

Sketch

Poison, pure lovely poison



Simon Hoggart

WILLIAM Hague returned to the House after two weeks of illness. When they drained his sinuses, they extracted a small reservoir of evil, mucus, poisonous gunk. Yesterday Mr Hague took the opportunity to spray it all over the Prime Minister.

It was quite the roughest Question Time since the election — vicious, rebarbative and thoroughly mean-spirited. We loved it, Mr Blair, however, seemed almost shattered by the experience. His hands were shaking, and at one point he gazed behind him, then up at the press gallery, as if hoping there was some relief from the fusillade of fury and contempt.

It began with a surprisingly mild question from Bob Marshall-Andrews, the Labour MP for Medway. Mr Marshall-Andrews is an unrecognised Old Labour trouble-maker. With his wild hair and ferocious gleam, he looks like a cross between Dennis the Menace and his dog Gnasher, and generally behaves like both of them.

He is a lawyer, and his question resembled the beginning of a long summing-up for the prosecution. After two hours he would have been screaming with rage and pointing a quivering finger at the miscreant in the dock. As it was, his point, mildly expressed, was that there should be a ban on ministers and officials dealing with people who had been government aides during the previous five years.

Mr Blair was equally mild. He'd clearly decided that it was a good idea, if not to shoot the Tories' fox, at least to give

it a painless lethal injection. He said he had asked the Cabinet Secretary to tighten the rules on lobbying. These would be strengthened and, he added, anyone who breached them "will be out on their ear".

Perhaps he thought that this blend of meanness and sweet reason would keep Mr Hague placid as recovering patients are supposed to be. But the Tory leader needed to prove to his party that he was back and at fighting weight.

His flat Yorkshire voice rose and fell, betraying what — if we didn't know better — might have been real emotion. When was the Government going to stop protecting its cronies and act?

Mr Blair replied as mildly as before, claiming (wrongly) that all the Observer allegations had been checked and proved untrue.

Mr Hague snapped back: "Even with my sinuses, I can smell the stench coming out of these revelations!" The Government front bench sat trying not to notice, like nuns on a train whose compartment has been invaded by drunken football fans. All except Gordon Brown, who allowed himself a merry, but very short, chuckle.

Mr Hague came slashing back. "When are you going to stop protecting the money-grabbing cronies you've surrounded yourself with — the feather-bedding, pocket-lining, money-grabbing cronies — and actually clean up this government?"

Mr Blair suddenly lost it. "This wasn't Jonathan Aitken, he said, or Neil Hamilton, or cash-for-questions, or Asil Nadir. 'Not a single allegation in that Observer article is true!'" he shouted again.

He is right about the Tories' Roll-Call of Shame, though some of us thought we voted Labour in because there would never be the faintest hint of that stuff again.

Still, as Paddy Ashdown pointed out a few moments later, it was "stomach-churning" to see the Tories complaining about sleaze.

Britain to get airborne cavalry for rapid hits on trouble spots □ Services to merge in combined war roles

Defence leaker may be Tory

Richard Norton-Taylor and Ewen MacAskill

PUBLICATION of the blueprint setting out the role of Britain's armed forces well into the next century was overshadowed yesterday when George Robertson, the Defence Secretary, was forced to apologise to the Commons for the leaking of the entire contents of his long-awaited review.

He told MPs that he ordered an immediate investigation by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, after copies of the 57-page Strategic Defence Review were sent to a number of newspapers on Tuesday night — and he said he hoped those involved would be severely dealt with.

The Conservatives accused the Government of deliberately leaking it to distract attention from the row over lobbyists. But evidence last night pointed to the Conservatives as being responsible.

The party was only supposed to get a first sight of it four hours before Mr Robertson

delivered his Commons statement but a Conservative source confirmed one of the party's MPs had a copy at tea-time on Tuesday.

Tony Blair challenged William Hague during Prime Minister's Question Time to deny the Tories were responsible but the Conservative leader carefully avoided doing so.

Copies of the review were also sent out to servicemen in sealed envelopes on Tuesday with instructions that they were not to be opened until Mr Robertson delivered the statement.

The much-heralded review firmly commits Britain to a worldwide role with the ability to send large expeditionary forces to trouble spots. "We do not want to stand idly by and watch humanitarian disasters or the aggression of dictators go unchecked," Mr Robertson says in his introduction to the document.

"In the post cold war world," he adds, "we must be prepared to go to the crisis, rather than have the crisis come to us."

Anticipating significant changes in the methods of

Main points

□ Joint rapid reaction forces able to mount operations involving some 15,000 troops at short notice.

□ "Joint Force 2000" of RAF and Navy jets operating from land and aircraft carriers.

□ Trident fleet of four submarines but only one on patrol at any one time carrying 48 warheads — half the previous ceiling. Reduced state of alert of several days "notice of fire".

□ Stockpile of fewer than 200 operationally available warheads.

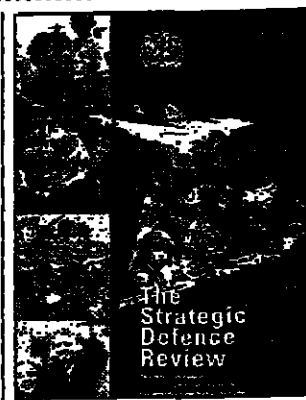
□ Two new large aircraft carriers capable of taking 50 planes, to replace three existing ones.

□ An "air cavalry", including the Parachute Regiment, equipped with Apache attack helicopters.

□ 2,500 troops return to Britain from Germany.

□ Army to be increased by 3,300. Territorial Army to be reduced from 56,000 to 40,000.

□ Defence budget to be cut by £915 million in real terms over next three years.



The Strategic Defence Review

warfare by 2015, the review states: "Operations will no longer be characterised as land, sea or air. There will instead be a single battlespace."

There will be a new, tri-service command structure, bringing together the navy, army, and RAF in joint rapid reaction forces and a combined airborne force of 400 helicopters. RAF and navy Harrier jump-jets will form a

single "Joint Force 2000". By about 2012, two large carriers will replace the three small ones while the Parachute Regiment will join a new airmobile brigade with attack helicopters, forming Britain's first "air cavalry".

These forces will enable Britain to respond quickly to a major international crisis like the Gulf war, or deploy forces in two smaller, Bosnia-

type, operations. The RAF's order for 232 Eurofighters, costing £15 billion, and the Trident nuclear submarine fleet will remain untouched, though the Government has disclosed the number of British nuclear warheads: one Trident will be on patrol at a time carrying 48 warheads — half the ceiling of 96 announced by the previous

government — though a total of nearly 200 warheads will be stockpiled.

The defence budget of more than £22 billion will be cut by £915 million in real terms over the next three years, if one-off sales of MoD assets are taken into account.

Despite cuts in aircraft, submarines, surface ships, and the Territorial Army, General Sir Charles Guthrie, Chief of the Defence Staff, welcomed the review.

But John Maples, the shadow defence secretary, accused the Government of not justifying the review on strategic grounds. "It was always a cost cutting exercise to help the Government balance their books," he said.

Liberal Democrat defence spokesman, Merzies Campbell, welcomed what he called Britain's new "expeditionary strategy" but warned that "it should not be based on an automatic assumption that the United Kingdom will in all circumstances underpin the foreign policy of the United States".

William Wallace, page 10; Leader comment, page 11

Review

Berkoff a Wolf in sheep's clothing

Michael Billington

Shakespeare's Villains
Haymarket

LIKE a mixture of Archie Rice and F. R. Leavis, Eleven Berkoff presents us with what he terms "a masterpiece in evil": a lecture-demonstration on the Bard's baddies from Iago to, somewhat surprisingly, Oberon that convinced me Berkoff's natural talent is more comic than satanic.

Berkoff's general comments on villainy in Shakespeare are, to be frank, not all that revealing. He tells us that it may spring from envious mediocrity, lack of love, social conditioning or sexual displacement. I wish he'd pursued the more interesting point that four of his chosen seven — Iago, Richard III, Macbeth and Coriolanus — are soldiers unable to adjust to peace. Did Shakespeare see a natural link between post-battle fatigue and moral madness?

As literary analysis, this 90-minute show leaves a lot to be desired. Where it does work is as a portrait of the actor's psyche. Playing Shakespeare's "villains," says Berkoff, "is like being in the ring with invisible ghosts you can't beat". That is a fascinating remark, and, by his constant invocation of Olivier's shade, you realise Berkoff is a natural romantic haunted and dominated by a demonic genius

whose spirit he can never quite exorcise.

Berkoff is at his best when he is talking about theatrical tradition. He recalls how Garfield's Hamlet, on seeing the Ghost, made spectators feel the theatrical temperature had suddenly dropped. He also amusingly describes the practical problems of Hamlet and Gertrude wearing lockets to depict "the counterfeit presentment of two brothers".

You feel that Berkoff is enthralled by the theatre's actor-driven past and suspicious of modern directors' Shakespeare. He is, in short, a Wolf in sheep's clothing.

At times he is also sardonically funny. He compares Richard III in peacetime to "a journalist who has no newspaper to write for". He even, rather audaciously, presents Shylock not as the conventional heroic victim but as a salivating comic villain.

I enjoyed Berkoff's cheeky chappie asides. But his portrayal of characters is somewhat erratic. His hands weave elaborate arabesques. He mocks the idea that you should pause at the end of a line yet, at one point, runs out of breath. He delivers everything at maximum volume.

Perhaps he should heed Hamlet's advice to the players that, even in the very whirlwind of passion, "you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness".

This review appeared in some editions yesterday.

Arctic route set to shrink the world for air travellers

James Meek in Moscow

CROSSING the North Pole will become a routine for intercontinental travellers as crossing the Atlantic from next year, when Russia throws open its Arctic airspace to long-haul flights by foreign airlines, allowing dramatic savings in journey times from Europe and North America to Asia.

Test flights are being carried out on a range of aerial cuts that will shave hours off the wearisome sequence of films, meals and cloud-gazing on routes like New York-Bangkok.

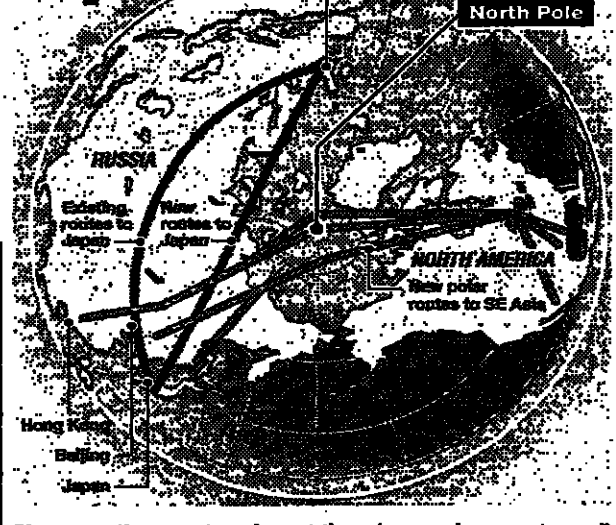
In one demonstration on Monday, the first commercial passenger flight to land at the

new Hong Kong airport was a Cathay Pacific 747 which had flown non-stop from New York over the Pole. The journey took 154 hours compared with the usual 21.

During the cold war, the Russian Arctic and Far East — frontline defensive areas spiked with missile sites, naval bases and nuclear early warning stations — were forbidden zones for foreign airlines, as Korean Airlines found to its cost in 1983 when one of its jumbo jets, apparently off-course, was shot down by Soviet fighters, killing 269 people.

Fifteen years on, a less paranoid, much poorer Russia is anxious to open up new routes as fast as possible. Every foreign aircraft that

Over the top



flies over the country shows money in its wake. With each passenger plane paying about 50 pence a mile in transit fees, Russia hopes to earn 2400 million a year to invest in its air-traffic control system.

"It's just Russia's good luck to be sitting right where all

the airways happen to go," said Leonid Sichebakov, head of the country's airspace allocation organisation.

The biggest savings in time, fuel and ticket prices will come on flights between South-east Asia and North America, as airlines switch from trans-Atlantic or trans-

Pacific to trans-polar routes. But passengers and airlines flying between western Europe and east Asia stand to benefit as well.

On a flat map of the world, the shortest line between Britain and Japan appears to be through Central Asia and northern China. In fact, because the world is a globe, the most direct route goes through the Russian Arctic — across the island of Novaya Zemlya, an old Soviet H-bomb testing site, past the port of Dixon and down through eastern Siberia.

British Airways, which has been working closely with the Russian aviation authorities on the introduction of a new satellite air-traffic control system, Fanstar, for the empty open spaces of the world's biggest country, plans to fit up to 40 of its 747s with the necessary equipment and to begin flying the Arctic route to Japan in 2000.

Though the time saving from a passenger's standpoint will in this case be slight — a route would cut up to half an hour off the London-Tokyo run — it will produce large fuel savings.

Today, most Europe-Japan air traffic flies along a single, crowded set of airways

through central Siberia. "The planes have to be spaced a long distance apart, like a convoy," said William Gailard, a Geneva-based spokesman for the International Air Transport Association, IATA.

The Arctic is not covered by Russian air-traffic control radar and big airlines like BA and KLM have been counting on the introduction of Fanstar to guarantee the future of the new air routes.

However, IATA believes a limited number of aircraft will be able to use the new routes — trans-polar for North America, "cross-polar" for Europe — even before the satellite system is in place.

Cathay Pacific told the Moscow Times newspaper that it planned to start scheduled trans-polar flights in the second half of 1999. Anthony Laven, infrastructure director for IATA's Asia-Pacific region, said the captain on a trial run by Cathay Pacific had been given all the help he needed by Russian controllers as he crossed into their airspace.

"The Russians have said that if there's an emergency a plane just has to transmit the international distress signal and it will be guided to the nearest airfield, even if it's a military one," said Mr Laven.

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Officers fail in libel appeal

Stuart Millar

THE Police Federation was last night facing a legal bill approaching £1 million after a federal-backed bid by five Metropolitan Police officers for a new libel trial against the Guardian was thrown out by the Court of Appeal.

The scale of the bill for its own costs and a substantial proportion of those of the newspaper will cause disquiet among the membership of the organisation. Until the Guardian case, it had fought and won 96 libel actions, netting £1,567,000.

The court dismissed the officers' claims that the High Court jury which rejected their original libel action last year had been misdirected by the trial judge.

The officers — Reynolds Bennett, Bernard Gillan, Paul Goscomb, Gerald Mapp and Robert Watton — had claimed that two articles published in the Guardian on January 31 1992 suggested they had been involved in planting and dealing drugs. This meaning was denied by the Guardian.

The newspaper's crime correspondent, Duncan Campbell, reported that eight unnamed officers had been transferred from Stoke Newington police station in north-east London at the same time as Operation Jackpot, an anti-corruption offensive headed by a senior officer, was under way. In their appeal, the officers contended that no jury properly directed could have reached the conclusion that the articles were not defamatory of them.

But the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Bingham, sitting with Lord Justice Hirst and Lord Justice Robert Walker, said: "Reviewing the complaints made both singly and cumulatively... we are not of the opinion that any wrong or miscarriage has been occasioned by any misdirection or non-direction in this case."

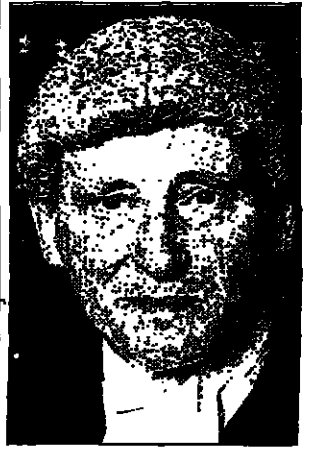
But after the verdict yesterday, Fred Broughton, the federation's chairman, said: "The Court of Appeal's decision draws this matter to a close. In supporting the case, the Police Federation did so in good faith and on strong legal advice."

It was not until early 1985 — shortly before the expiry of the three-year limit on libel proceedings — that the officers launched their legal action. They had waited until the completion of the Met's internal investigation when they had been informed that there was insufficient evidence to prosecute them.

Since the case, the time limit has been cut by the 1996 Defamation Act to one year after publication, preventing such delays from occurring again.

During the original trial, the Guardian strenuously denied that the allegations identified in the articles identified the five plaintiffs to anyone outside a small circle of relatives and colleagues, implied guilt or pre-judged the outcome of Operation Jackpot.

Defending the newspaper, George Carman, QC, told the jury the officers' action was strained and contrived and a wholly unjustified attempt to gain damages from a national newspaper. For the officers, Tom Shields, QC, had argued that the articles stigmatised the five officers.



'We are not of the opinion that any miscarriage has been occasioned'
Lord Bingham, above



Tina Brown, leaving the New Yorker editorship to 'apply her genius to film, television and books' as head of her own multi-media company

'People in tears' as Tina Brown quits but New York wonders: was she pushed?

Joanna Coles in New York

ALL week Manhattan's media had been on tenterhooks: would she or wouldn't she renew the contract meant to have been signed by last Wednesday?

Yesterday they got their answer. Tina Brown, the city's highest profile editor, confirmed that she would not be resigning but would indeed be leaving the New Yorker after five and a half years as editor, to start her own multi-media company under the umbrella of Miramax Films.

"There were people in tears, when she told everyone," said Bill Buford, the magazine's Brown-appointed fiction editor. "She was a brilliant editor. People were really devastated."

Though her arrival in September 1993 terrified old New Yorker writers — several including Garrison Keillor, Ian Frazier, Jamaica Kincaid and Holly Brubach, left proclaiming the barbarians were at the gate — Ms Brown had quickly assembled her own team of writers, including Adam Gopnik, Martin Amis and Salman Rushdie. Publicity for the revamped magazine was on a scale even New York hadn't seen before.

Yesterday at Miramax, co-chairman Harvey Weinstein called her the "best editor in the world" and said the new

venture — to include a "new concept" magazine — would allow her to "take her genius and apply it to film, television and books".

But after the initial shock, New Yorkers immediately sat down to analyse the subject: was she pushed? "The last time the phones went this berserk was when she arrived at the New Yorker," said one prominent writer.

Indeed the speculation about Ms Brown's future is worthy of a long New Yorker article in itself and has been preoccupying the city's media ever since her husband,

Harry Evans, announced he was leaving publishers Random House last November.

Both Random House and the New Yorker are owned by the eccentric billionaire S.I. ("SI") Newhouse, and Mr Evans' departure to work for another media mogul, Mort Zuckerman, was interpreted as a sign that Britain's once golden couple no longer ranked among the favoured few round Mr Newhouse's dining table.

What fascinated people most, however, was the way in which tantalising details of Ms Brown's battles within Condé

Nast, the magazine's parent company, frequently appeared in the press. It is rare, for example, for anyone to know, or care, when an editor's contract is up for renewal. But a string of gossip pieces were pored over — as was the news that the New Yorker would no longer occupy its historic offices on 43rd Street but be folded into the Condé Nast empire in a modern skyscraper on Times Square.

There had been much public discussion, too, about the power battle between Ms Brown and Steve Florio, the president of Condé Nast, who

recently removed his brother, Thomas, the New Yorker's publisher, and replaced him with someone else without consulting Ms Brown.

There were also rival articles seeking to apportion blame for the magazine's financial losses — losses said to have infuriated and puzzled Mr Newhouse. Though Ms Brown has increased circulation from 500,000 to 800,000, the magazine has not made a profit since Mr Newhouse bought it 13 years ago for \$168 million (currently \$100 million), when it still turned a modest profit. Last year, despite the boom in advertising among consumer magazines, it lost in the region of \$11 million.

However, Mr Florio's decision in sacking his brother without consulting the editor, was yesterday being seen as a blunder that pushed Ms Brown over the edge. "I think she had a showdown with Steve Florio and through him with SI," said one contributor yesterday, refusing to be named. "She was going to be under much tighter budgetary constraints. And she was annoyed because it's all been played out so publicly."

Mr Newhouse's mood was described as "rueful". Another writer said the Brown deal with Miramax had been organised "very last minute", suggesting she needed to ensure she had something interesting to

A literary legacy

HAROLD ROSS 1925-52

ROSS placed great value on witty writing and a high-brow audience. Concentrating on humorous prose, fiction and cartoons, he said he did not want to edit a magazine that would be appreciated by "the little old lady from Dubuque" — the sticks. For him the New Yorker was about more than journalism. When one writer threatened to resign, Ross said: "You can't quit. This isn't a magazine. It's a movement."

WILLIAM SHAWN 1952-1987

Shy and bookish, Shawn read every word that went into the magazine and was notorious for overbrowsing manuscripts. He shunned parties, was vigorously opposed to advertising, but presided over a readership of around 500,000 with the highest renewal rate of any magazine. Among articles that became important books were John Hershey's Hiroshima and James Baldwin's The Fire Next Time. A new proprietor, S.I. Newhouse, described Shawn as "the finest editor of his time", and then forced him to resign within two years.

ROBERT GOTTLIEB 1967-1992

"THERE are four things in my life: work, the ballet, reading and my family," said Gottlieb, whose arrival after Shawn's ousting was controversial enough for 154 staff to sign a letter asking him not to come. Gottlieb wore casual clothes and never ate lunch outside his office. But despite Gottlieb's commissioning of a pop section, Newhouse was disappointed by the rate of transformation. The editor left after "conceptual differences" over the "further evolution" of the magazine, with the circulation at 650,000.

Sullen, angry mood on streets of Lagos

continued from page 1

lices. "But we, the Yorubas, are the educated ones, they are just playing on privilege. It will not be any different with the new man," said Mr Ayo, using the common Lagosian expression for Gen Abacha's successor, Abdulsalam Abubakar.

As a crowd gathered around the minibus, Yomi Segun, aged 36, a typewriter salesman, met with a roar of approval at the suggestion that Nigeria should be run by three governments — one for the Ibo tribe, in the east, another for the Hausa, in the north, and a third for the economically powerful Yoruba, in the south and west.

He said: "We had a civil war [Biafra 1967-1970] about tribes, and in those days we were with the Hausa. But they are Muslim and we are Christian, and they have abused their power. There is only one type of good Hausa and he is a Christian."

The crowd would not countenance the suggestion that in the world's most linguistically complicated country — 250 tribes in 30 states and some 400 languages — what

they were advocating was ethnic warfare.

"There is no opposition left, nobody trusts politicians, nobody goes to vote. Even Abacha had dined with the military in his time. So all this talk of transition to democracy is a joke to us."

"The rest of the world is playing their game by talking to the military who are all Hausas, or at least from the north," said Mr Segun. "This is our problem. The northerners are not our legitimate rulers."

A conciliatory voice came from Aggie Dada, a woman in

her sixties who had spent most of her life as a dinner lady in London schools. "What we need is for everyone to sit down, from the market woman to the chiefs of tribes, and discuss how we can solve this country's problems. Violence is too sad."

"But it is hard to see how we can get by without it. The soldiers in the streets are doing their best to keep things under control but, at the end of the day, they represent the Hausas," she said.

Cabinet disbanded, page 9; Letters, page 11

'This is our problem and we need to sort it out. The northerners are not our legitimate rulers'

After manful struggles with vocabulary and accent, he has successfully replaced "Good evening" with "Eellow" and "That must be dissappointing" with "You must be gu'ed."
Mark Lawson on David Mellor, the broadcaster

G2 page 7

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BBC

W

Greg Palast tells **Luke Harding** of the help he gave senior figures

Sleaze row man's links with Labour

THE full extent of the sleaze row man's links with the Labour Party was revealed last night, when it emerged he had been asked by John Prescott to help him with his party conference speech.

Mr Palast said the future deputy prime minister invited him back to his suite, and, over a drink, asked him whether he knew any good jokes. He wanted to make his conference address the following day funnier.

The 46-year-old journalist as the centre of the "cash for access" row was also flown over from New York to London to brief senior Labour officials on strategy towards the newly privatised water companies. The Labour Party paid for his economy ticket.

"They constantly asked for my advice," he said. "I had good and close relationships with shadow ministers such as Margaret Beckett, John Battle and Nigel Griffiths, and special advisers such as Dan Corry and Mark Taylor. I was very reluctant to take on this investigation but I just could not ignore the evidence of sleaze."

He added: "At no stage did anyone say: 'You are a liar'."

Last night Mr Prescott said he could not remember the encounter. "You can say for bloody certain he was never in my room. I can't recall meeting him. There is only one possibility — he might have seen me in the alleyway outside Tony Blair's suite."

Mr Prescott admitted he



GREG PALAST: He said John Prescott invited him back to his suite, and, over a drink, asked him if he knew any good jokes. He wanted to make his conference address funnier



JOHN PRESCOTT: 'I can't recall meeting him. You remember if you meet a Yank. I would never ask for a US joke. There is nothing in US humour. It is entirely different'

had "had difficulty" in making his 1996 Blackpool conference speech amusing.

"I didn't have any funny jokes. I know my son and others asked for jokes from the people in the bar (around 2am)... You remember if you meet a Yank. I would never ask for a US joke."

Mr Palast revealed that before the election he had helped Ms Beckett, then shadow trade and industry spokeswoman, prepare her attack on the Conservative government's nuclear policy. He and his wife, Linda, later had several drinks at the House of Commons with Ms

Beckett and energy spokesman John Battle. The journalist's "voluminous memoranda" were so useful to the shadow Labour team that Mr Palast was invited to spend the weekend at Mr Battle's constituency home in Leeds.

Mr Palast said he declined a recent offer from Ms Beckett's special adviser to continue to provide help on "policy positions" because it conflicted with his work as a journalist. Last night Ms Beckett's office declined to comment on the President of the Board of Trade's previous links.

Mr Palast's revelations follow a personal attack by Peter

Mendelson, who described him as "a man with an agenda", adding: "Anyone who listens to him realises he has an axe to grind."

Mr Palast replied: "I'm surprised that the man that Labour has asked so often to provide help and expertise should now have been labelled in this way."

At the pre-election party conference, Mr Palast had been asked by Labour to address fringe meetings on energy policy. He and his sister, Gina, a White House official, were both invited to help with Mr Prescott's speech — but declined, fearing this might compromise the Clinton administration. Mr Palast shrugged off an attack by yesterday's Mirror, which dubbed him "The Liar". It quoted remarks by an American judge who dismissed him as "perverse, biased and evasive". The comments, he said, were directed not just at him, but at a team of experts, in a case which his side went on to win.

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Drumcree crisis



Down to the wire... A policeman in riot gear keeps watch on Orange marchers camped at Drumcree. PHOTOGRAPH: MAX NASH

Tory challenge over lobbyists

Peter Hetherington

TORIES last night demanded an inquiry into the employment of New Labour lobbyists by the Labour-controlled Local Government Association after its leaders angrily rejected claims that they had been taken on to get an early draft of a forthcoming town hall reform white paper.

Shadow local government minister Richard Ottaway claimed the association was using £6,000 of council taxpayers' money each month to en-

play the lobbyists Lawson Lucas Mendelson (LLM).

He said senior employees of the association had left to work with lobbyists — former advisers to Labour ministers when they were in opposition. "The LGA has to have a very hard look at this," he added.

"What's becoming apparent is that these people are as thick as thieves with each other." But last night, LGA chairman Sir Jeremy Beecham denied the company was being used to get an advance copy of the white paper, due later this month. "This is an outrageous allegation and is tantamount

to an accusation of illegal activity on behalf of the association, which I reject outright."

Earlier, the Local Government Minister, Hilary Armstrong, turned on a BBC reporter after he asked how Tony Blair's pledge to be "purer than pure" on lobbying squared with the LGA's links with LLM and founder Ben Lucas, former researcher to Labour figures like Jack Straw.

"Firstly, Mr Blair did not suggest that," she countered. "Secondly, the LGA is an independent organisation and it is up to the LGA how they

develop their relationship with the wider world."

The minister, who had earlier addressed the LGA's annual conference in Bournemouth, said it was "absolutely outrageous" to suggest that anyone in the Government had been involved in a deal to deliver advance copy of the white paper to the LGA.

The LGA said it was employing Lawson Lucas Mendelson on contract until September, with the agreement of Labour, Tory and Liberal Democrat councillors, "to provide advice on its public affairs strategy".

John Miffin
Ireland Correspondent

THE Orange Order last night was raising the stakes ahead of today's meeting with Tony Blair in Downing Street over the Drumcree crisis, warning him that it was close to outright confrontation with the security forces at the Co. Antrim church. Its leaders suggested that they might even boycott the meeting.

David Jones, spokesman for Portadown Orangemen, said the situation would become

even more dangerous towards the weekend. Mr Blair should be aware the clock was ticking and little time was left.

July 12 marks the Orange Order's celebrations of King William III's victory at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Thousands of Orangemen are expected to pour into Drumcree after their own marches, with hundreds likely to travel from Scotland and England.

Four hundred extra troops flew into Northern Ireland last night. Another 400 arrive today, bringing the army's strength to 18,000. The Orange Order's appar-

ent reluctance to meet Mr Blair stemmed from his insistence that the Parades Commission's ruling would be upheld. It banned Portadown district from taking its traditional route along the nationalist Garvaghy Road.

Figures showed there had been 437 attacks on the police since the stand-off began on Sunday. Included were 12 shootings and 26 blast bombings; 44 police officers had been injured, one suffering a fractured skull.

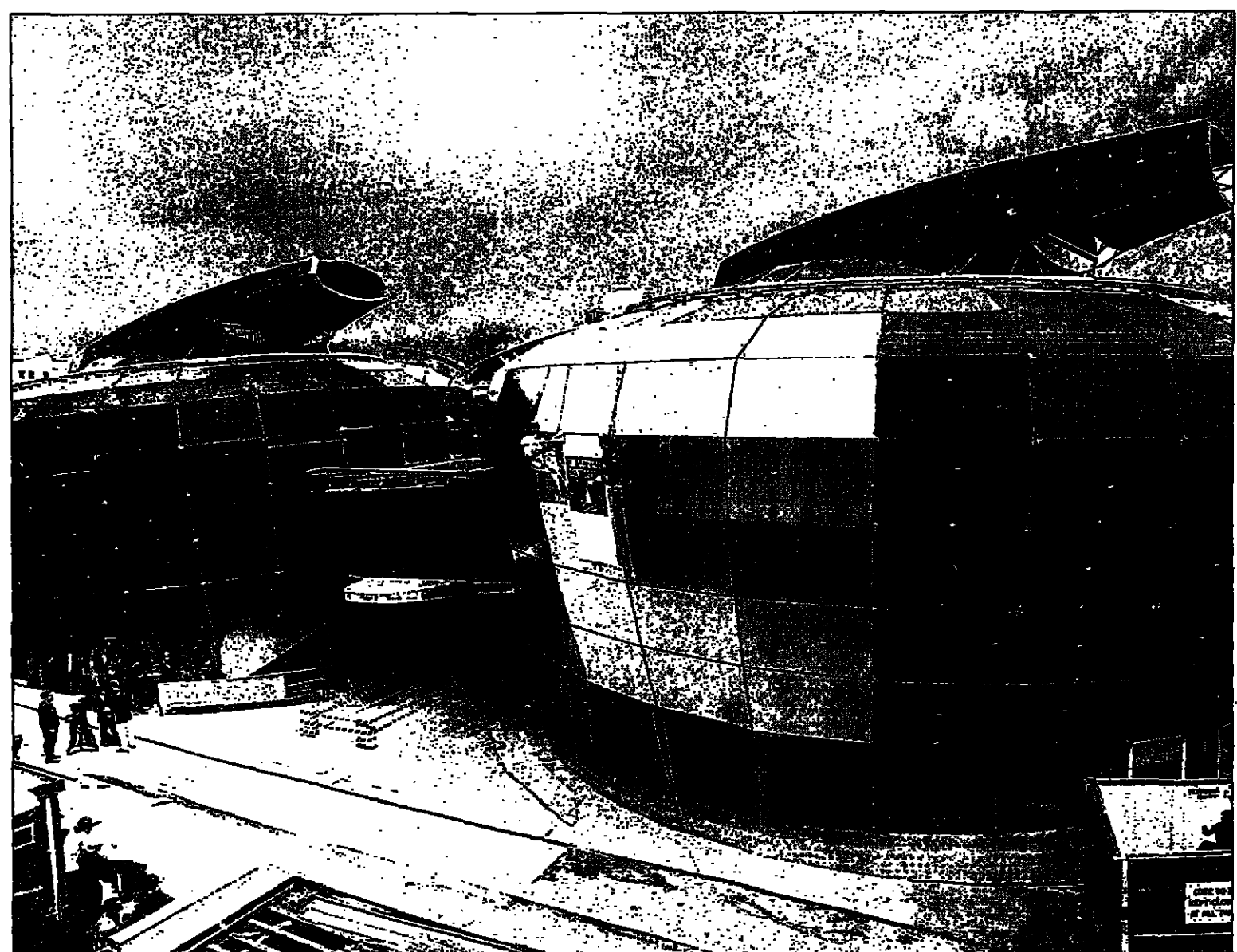
There were car hijackings and burning of barricades around Northern Ireland for a

third successive night. Public transport was again disrupted, and shops in most towns were shutting early.

Ms Mowlem, Northern Ireland Secretary, met Rouse Flanagan, RUC chief constable, yesterday. She said she wanted to thank his officers for their efforts in upholding the Parades Commission's legally binding decision.

She indicated that the Orange Order must accept responsibility for the violence. "It is not enough to call for peaceful protest if at the same time you are not abiding by the law," she said.

Orangemen give Blair ultimatum



The 'topping out' ceremony yesterday at the National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield, which will house data on pop music. PHOTOGRAPH: DON MCFEE

Pop music gets into the interactive groove with £15m moving feast to fete the genre's dynamics

BITAIN'S most sophisticated karaoke studio was unveiled yesterday by two Elvis Presley look-alikes on absurd ropes, writes Martin Wakewright.

They slid 50 feet down a black tarpaulin to reveal the first glimpse of Britain's £15,000,000 National Centre for Popular Music, a combination of archive and recording studio in Sheffield, South Yorkshire. The centre opens next July, with a brief to tell the

history of pop and rock and allow visitors to try their own skills. "You will be able to record yourself with a range of backing instruments, design an album sleeve or be a radio DJ for a while," said Tim Strickland, the centre's creative director.

The building will also house a "Rockopaedia" — information about 700 musicians and singers — and a circular "sensurround" theatre, with popular

music from 1900 to the present day.

The centre is interested in ideas for permanently changing exhibitions to avoid becoming a static commemoration of rock and pop.

After wrestling unsuccessfully with a dud naval flare to launch the Kivises, the building's architect, Nigel Coates, said: "There can't be any such thing as a museum for popular music, which is always changing."



Nigel Coates, the architect... Centre is not a museum

Judges back ex-Irish PM against Sunday Times

'Reynolds did not receive a fair trial'

Stuart Miller

ALBERT Reynolds, the former Irish prime minister, yesterday won the latest round in his legal battle with the Sunday Times, as the Appeal Court granted him a retrial of his libel action against the newspaper.

The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Bingham ruled that Mr Reynolds did not receive a fair trial during the original hearing in 1998. He also denied a counter-appeal from the newspaper, which, if upheld, could have transformed the media's ability to cover politicians' activities.

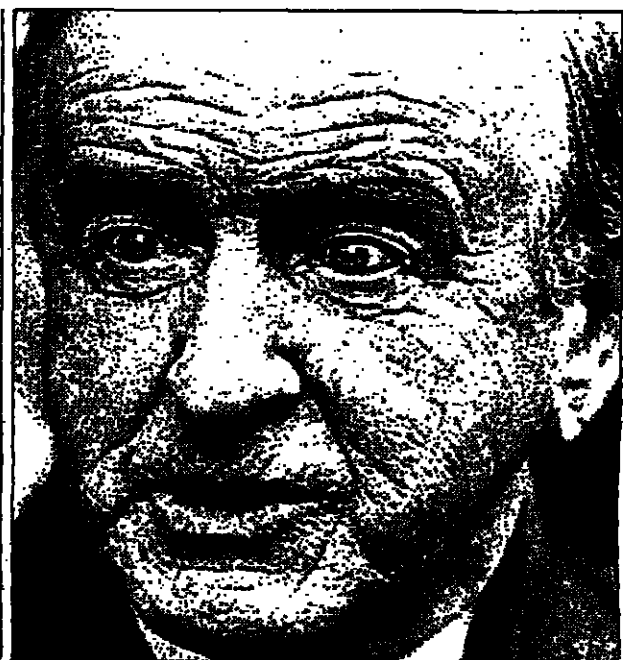
The former Taoiseach, aged 66, went to the Appeal Court after the High Court verdict two years ago left him facing huge legal bills even though the jury found that he had been libelled by a story published in 1984 after the collapse of his Fianna Fail-Labour coalition government.

Under the headline, Goodbye Gomben man: Why a fib too far proved fatal, the Sunday Times accused Mr Reynolds of misleading the Dail and lying to Labour colleagues. While the jury found that he had been libelled, it decided that he was not entitled to damages because the paper had not acted maliciously. It had simply repeated allegations made in the Irish parliament.

As the paper had already paid £5,000 into court to settle the dispute, Mr Reynolds was ordered to pay his own costs up to the time the payment was made, and the costs of the Sunday Times after that date.

But Lord Justice Robert Walker and Lord Justice Hirst, sitting with Lord Justice Bingham, set aside the verdict and ordered a new trial after accepting Mr Reynolds's claim that the trial judge's summing up had been "confusing and unstructured", had at times misrepresented his evidence, and may have been misleading to the jury.

The judges said it was with "very great regret" they had found the cumulative effects of the misdirections had denied



Albert Reynolds: 'Case was about honesty and truth', after he won the latest round in his battle against the newspaper

Mr Reynolds a fair trial.

Outside the court, Mr Reynolds said his decision to appeal had been vindicated. "I was always a strong believer that the truth would come out. The case was about honesty, it was about truth, and I think the Appeal Court has clearly spelled that out."

"My view is the office of Taoiseach was entitled to be protected against untrue allegations. I was not going to let it go unchallenged. I was told it might cost me a lot of money, and I said that was the price to be paid for a retrial."

In its counter-appeal, the Sunday Times claimed the article was in the public interest and published in good faith, and should therefore be protected by the rule of qualified privilege.

Lord Lester QC, for the paper, told the court the case highlighted the need for a reinterpretation of the libel laws to protect newspapers and broadcasters who criticised politi-

cians or other public officials — even in cases such as this where the stories proved erroneous.

He said the extension of the rule of qualified privilege should only cover stories about an individual's public duties, and would mean inaccurate stories could only be challenged if they were published out of recklessness or malice.

But the judges said: "While those who engage in public life must expect and accept that their public conduct will be the subject of close scrutiny and robust criticism, they should not in our view be taken to expect or accept that their conduct should be the subject of false and defamatory statements."

The Sunday Times, which was ordered to pay the costs of the appeal, was refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords. The retrial will not be heard until the Lords have considered a petition from the newspaper to hear the case.



In G2 today: The star of Mojo learnt about sex from a nun, acting from John Lennon and fame from Ken Dodd.

Plus in G2: Richard Price used to do cocaine, now he drinks skimmed milk and avoids butter. Also: Consumer and Online

Holidaymakers get 'bled dry' in buying foreign currency

Rory Carroll

HIGH street travel agents are bleeding dry holidaymakers who don't shop around before buying foreign exchange, according to a survey.

Well-known firms like Lunn Poly and Thomas Cook offer the worst deals, creaming off up to 10 per cent more than rivals, it found.

Trading standards officers in Warwickshire bought £50 of French francs and Spanish pesetas from banks, travel agents, a tourist information centre, and the Post Office, selling it back to the same branches a week later.

There was £3.10 difference between the best and worst company when francs were bought, and £3.44 difference when they were sold back.

For pesetas, the difference was £4.88 and £3.28 respectively.

Using travel agents as a one-stop shop to book holidays and change money offered poor value.

Officers were surprised to find that some of the worst deals were offered by travel agents who heavily promoted their bureau de change facilities.

Travellers wanting to

Vive la différence

Cost of £70 French francs:

NatWest £49.78
Halifax £49.90
Midland Co-Op £49.93
World Choice £52.06
Post Office £52.59
Barclays Bank £52.95
Lloyds Bank £52.95
Thomas Cook £53.00
Tourist Information £53.06
Lunn Poly £54.88.

Cost of 12,000 Spanish pesetas:

Midlands Co-Op £50.43
World Choice £52.48
NatWest £52.85
Post Office £52.89
Barclays Bank £53.24
Halifax £53.32
Lloyds Bank £53.47
Tourist Information £53.58
Thomas Cook £53.63
Lunn Poly £55.31

change money into several currencies at once were charged for each transaction at all but one of those surveyed — Barclays Bank.

Noel Hunter, Warwickshire's chief trading standards officer, said customers should beware no-commission and free buy-back offers, which often masked a poor initial exchange rate.

"Our advice to consumers is to make the best deal by shopping around at the time of buying and return home with little or preferably no currency," he said.

Lunn Poly refused to comment on its bottom position, but Thomas Cook defended its

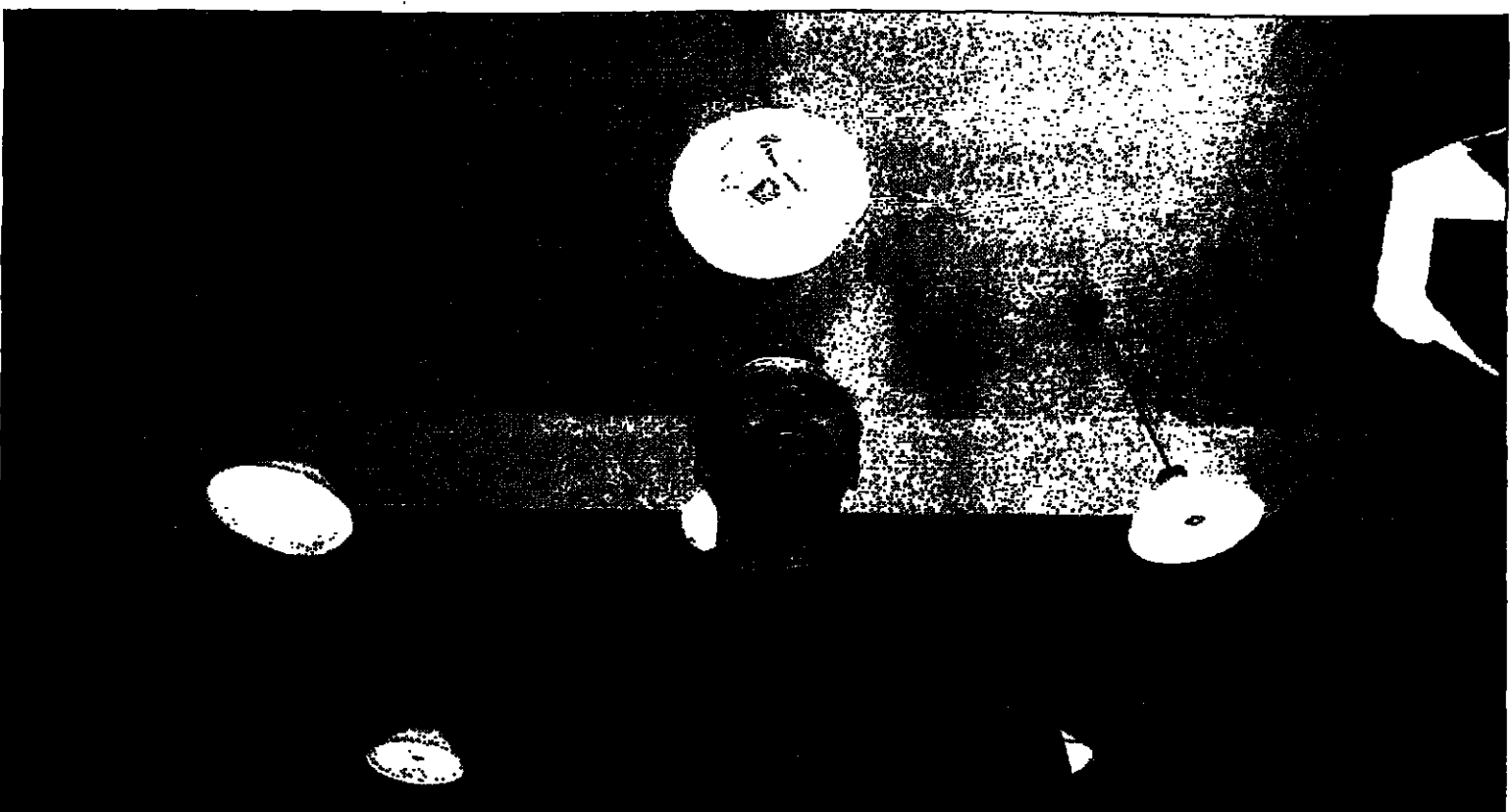
poor showing by attacking the terms of the survey.

A spokeswoman said: "It takes no account of the fact that exchange rates vary from day to day, currency to currency and branch to branch. Different branches have different commission structures depending on the level of competition within that area."

"No mention is made of the fact that we keep large stocks of currency compared to other sources and have fully-trained currency staff on hand to help advise our customers during opening hours."

The Association of Travel Agents declined to comment.

Hirst's prescription falls foul of pharmacists



AFASHIONABLE west London restaurant, owned by the artist Damien Hirst (above), is to be sued by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, amid concerns that customers may be confused by the illegal use of the name Pharmacy, it emerged yesterday, writes Amelia Gentleman.

While most people who

step inside Pharmacy want nothing more than a cocktail or two, the occasional visitor is misguided enough to try to obtain prescription medicine from the bar. This confusion has prompted the Royal Pharmaceutical Society to sue the owners for committing a criminal offence under the 1968 Medicines Act, which forbids the unauthorised use of the titles Pharmacy and Pharmacist.

The society said there was a "grave danger of the public being misled" by the restaurant's medical motif which could encourage them to go there to seek medical advice.

In addition to the large green Pharmacy sign on the front of the Notting Hill venue, a huge glass window displays shelves loaded with packets of Beechams, Alka Seltzer and Hedex pills. Inside the theme continues with drug cabinets, bottles, syringes and suppositories.

The occasional ailing customer has found the only medications on sale are the Detox and Voltolol Retarding Agent cocktails listed on the drinks menu.

Susan Sharpe, a spokeswoman for the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said it was trying to protect consumers. "The council's overriding concern is that the public can always be confident that where they see the Pharmacy sign they can obtain a professional pharmacy service."

PHOTOGRAPH: GRAHAM TURNER

Seeing red at 'fake' curry

Dyed-in-the-wool fans risk their health, writes Martin Wainwright

Martin Wainwright

ATHOROUGHLY modern version of Delhi Belly has been exposed by trading standards officers, tipped off by the case of the Dayglo Tandoori.

A survey of Asian restaurants in North Yorkshire discovered "shockingly high" doses of artificial food colouring to appeal to diners wanting something vivid with their lager.

Samples from 17 out of 23 restaurants produced up to four times the legal limit of additives such as tartrazine, the orange-red dye

associated with hyperactivity and asthma. Other chemicals found above legal limits in Scarborough, Northallerton and Harrogate included Sunset Yellow and the colour enhancer Ponceau 4R.

Gordon Gresty, head of trading standards in the county, said "handful" of additives were involved in some cases, which are being taken to court for "serious breaches of food regulations". The Mega restaurant in Selby was fined £200 with £150 costs this week in the first prosecution from the survey.

Mr Gresty said chemical

cooking was cheaper for restaurants and appealed to some customers who mistakenly considered it "more authentic".

He said: "The use of these colourants in such excessive amounts poses a serious health risk to many people."

Pat Chapman, chairman of the Curry Club and author of the Good Curry Guide, said: "I haven't come across a survey before showing misuse to this extent. ... in India you would never see the bright effect you get from food colouring. The paprika, chillies and other vegetables they use are naturally red, but come out a sort of dull brownish orange when cooked. That's what people should look for."



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Adrian Fitzpatrick, who has £18,000 on the Arsenal/Brazil double and side bets of £5,000 each on France and Croatia

PHOTOGRAPH BY GAVIN FOGG

Helen Carter on a £544,000 prospect Bet means flower man comes up roses

FORGET Brazil: the real winner of Sunday's World Cup final will be a Birmingham flower importer set to receive £544,000 from the bookmakers if the favourites succeed.

In June last year, Adrian Fitzpatrick, of Solihull, bet £18,000 on both Arsenal winning the Premiership and Brazil winning the World Cup, with odds of 9-2 for each bet at William Hill.

When the Gunners lifted the Premiership title at the end of last season the money was rolled over, but now he is hoping that Ronaldo and his team-mates will complete the final part of the bet for him.

Even if Brazil lose, Mr Fitzpatrick will still win because he has a side bet of £5,000 on both of last night's semi-finalists, France and Croatia — ensuring at least £55,000 from the tournament.

Mr Fitzpatrick, aged 41, first tasted gambling success when, aged 16, he bet 10 pence on a Grand National horse which romped home.

He said his next serious bet

was in 1994, when he staked £13,000 on a treble on Crystal Palace to win the First Division, Manchester United to take the Premiership and Brazil to lift the World Cup — which earned him £395,000 when all three teams won.

"I was confident they would do as I had studied the form," he said. He took his family on a Caribbean cruise, bought a

'Sheer common sense told me Brazil will win the World Cup'

top-of-the-range Mercedes car, invested some of his winnings, and donated some to cancer charities.

Mr Fitzpatrick, who buys most of his flowers from Holland, said he was calm during the Brazil-Holland match, even when the penalties were being taken. "My friends from Holland have been rib-

bling me, saying I was going to lose my money," he said. "Sheer common sense told me that Brazil will win the World Cup."

But he does not always have the golden touch. He lost a total of £10,000 in the 1996 and 1997 football seasons after wrongly predicting that Arsenal would win the Premiership in both years.

Mr Fitzpatrick, a Birmingham City supporter who has four children, spends up to 30 hours a week studying team form and drawing up shortlists before deciding who to back. The secret, he says, is to place bets early while the odds are good.

He shuns casinos and other forms of gambling because the odds are stacked against winning.

A William Hill spokesman said: "If Mr Fitzpatrick wins his bet he will be the biggest winner out of the World Cup." The spokesman added: "Altogether the odds were 30-1 against Arsenal winning the Premiership and Brazil winning the World Cup."

Sport supremo and son are jailed for fraud

John Duncan
Sports Correspondent

PETER Lawson, for 23 years one of the most powerful men in British sport, was jailed for 18 months yesterday for fraud after being found guilty of "wholesale dishonesty" in siphoning off at least £80,000 from the Central Council of Physical Recreation, of which he was general secretary.

Mr Lawson's son Christopher, aged 28, who worked at the CCPR during his father's reign there, which ended in 1995, was also convicted of fraud and jailed for two years for his part in scams that left the council with a £300,000 black hole.

"It is indeed a sad day when father and son appear together in the dock," said Judge Geoffrey Rivlin as he sentenced the pair, describing their offences as "a gross breach of trust". He added: "These offences implicated, and in some cases compromised, other people in your dishonesty and involved considerable forethought and effort."

Lawson senior, 58, of Sidcup, Kent, was convicted on Tuesday of two charges of conspiracy to defraud and four of furnishing false information. His son, also of Sidcup, was found guilty of two offences of conspiracy to defraud, one of theft and six of furnishing false information.

The judge said of the son's role in the dishonesty: "I have no doubt you conceived a good part of it yourself. You caused so many false invoices to be raised, you told so many lies,



Peter Lawson... guilty of 'gross breach of trust'

that it has been difficult to keep track of them. You were driving the fraudulent activities as hard as you could."

The main fraud involved the consultancy Sport and Leisure Communications, which Peter Lawson set up in 1988 with himself and his son as directors. He billed the council for non-existent consultancy work to conceal thefts of taxpayers' money.

The judge also criticised them for a "particularly mean offence" in pocketing £8,400 in cash from the proceeds of a 80th birthday fundraising dinner for former footballer Sir Stanley Matthews.

Accountants KPMG estimated total thefts at £300,000, but police never found where it all went. Apart from travel expenses, they identified nearly £3,000 spent on Peter Lawson's £250,000 house and £1,500 for a bathroom for his son.

The CCPR technical officer, Nigel Hook, three years ago passed his concerns about frauds to his superiors.

Move to protect helpline users

David Brindle, Social
Services Correspondent

SPECIAL numbers are to be introduced for recognised telephone helplines so that callers may dial free and avoid detection by their families.

The move, announced yesterday, follows a number of cases in which people have faced embarrassment or recrimination after the helpline numbers they had called appeared on phone bills.

Callers have been exposed for having rung helplines about cancer, suicide and domestic violence — and perpetrators of violence have then exacted punishment.

The introduction of special numbers was disclosed at the annual meeting of the Telephone Helplines Association, which has been campaigning for the change for a decade.

The new, toll-free, numbers will start with the prefix 0800-

900. Under an agreement with BT and Ofcom, approved services will qualify for a discount for existing toll-free lines with an 0800-prefix.

A pilot scheme will start in the autumn and the service is expected to be available generally early next year.

Maxine Rosenfield, who chairs the association, said helplines had been putting themselves at risk.

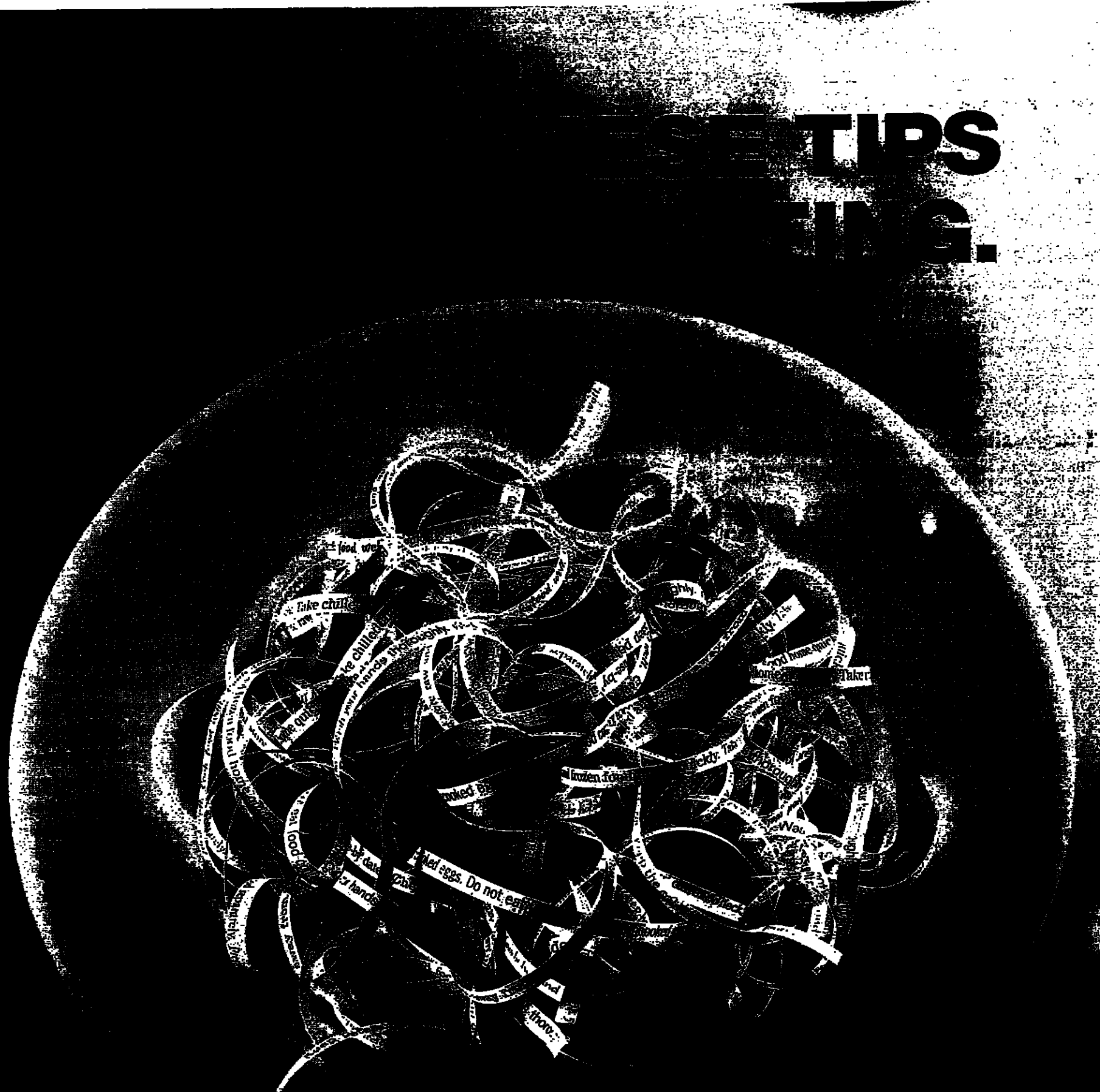
"Without realising it, some of the most vulnerable people were placing themselves in even greater jeopardy," Ms Rosenfield added.

The new system will give helplines the advantages of toll-free 0800 numbers, which do not appear on itemised phone bills, without premium overheads. Dialling such numbers costs the receiving organisation between 8.5p and 12p a minute. Calls to 0800-800 numbers would cost 3.5p a minute, BT and Ofcom said.



"They can force you off the street, but is that the problem solved? It's not the street that's the problem. It's me."
A life on the streets

G2 cover story



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Agriculture
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and Food

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News in brief

Clinton backs gun control bill

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton yesterday called on United States lawmakers not to "cup out" of the need to tighten restrictions on children's access to firearms after a series of killings that Mr Clinton said had "wounded all Americans".

Flanked by the parents of some of the school-shooting tragedies that have rocked America, Mr Clinton urged backing for a bipartisan Senate bill that would hold adults criminally responsible if they allowed children easy access to loaded firearms.

Before Mr Clinton spoke, the mother of one of the victims of the Jonesboro, Arkansas, shootings in March spoke movingly in support of more controls. "To every gun owner in America I want to say, please, please, for the sake of the children, lock up the guns," Suzann Wilson said. — *Martin Kettle, Washington.*

Rebels raid refugee camp

UGANDAN rebels killed three people and abducted at least 100 others in a raid on a refugee camp for Ugandans in eastern Congo, a newspaper reported.

Allied Democratic Forces rebels attacked Kikiri refugee camp, about five miles east of the Ugandan border, on Saturday, the Monitor said. A military spokesman confirmed the attack.

The Ugandans fled to Congo last year after the rebels attacked their villages. — *AP, Kampala.*

Bomb in toilet injures seven

A BOMB injured seven men when it exploded in a lavatory in a suburban shopping mall, Philippines police said.

The blast scattered shrapnel in the third-floor toilet of the mall in Calocan City, north of Manila. Police said it was the second blast in the rest room since 1996. — *AP, Manila.*

35 missing in ferry tragedy

INDONESIAN authorities have called off a search for victims of a ferry accident in which 35 people died and 35 more are missing. Fifty-two people were rescued and 85 bodies were found after the KMP Belana Nusantara capsized and sank on June 26 between the islands of Sumbawa and Lombok. — *AP, Jakarta.*

Nuclear mishap at train station

A CRANE ripped the metal covering of a rail container carrying nuclear waste as it was loading it on to a truck in northern Germany. Nuclear safety officials found no leaks of waste.

The accident at the Magdeburg-Rothensee train station occurred as the waste was being sent to a storage centre. The crane ripped a 23in-long tear in the container's covering but did not damage the thick concrete underneath. — *AP, Magdeburg.*

Sea horse numbers plummet

ASIA'S once-abundant population of sea horses has declined alarmingly because of heavy demand for their use in traditional medicines, aphrodisiacs and aquariums, conservationists said. The destruction of their habitat is also contributing to the decline.

"We're dealing with a situation where we still have time," said Heather Hall of London's Zoological Society.

About 40 conservationists and traders are meeting in the Philippines this week to discuss ways of saving the sea creatures without banning their collection. — *AP, Cebu.*

Plug pulled on Mir launch

THE NEXT crew bound for the Mir space station will blast off 10 days later than planned because the Russian government failed to pay the space programme's electricity bills.

Yuri Semyonov, head of the corporation that runs Mir, said next month's launch had been postponed because local authorities at the Baikonur cosmodrome, which is leased from Kazakhstan, had turned off the power for two weeks. — *AP, Moscow.*



Mikhail Markhasev gestures after leaving the Santa Monica courthouse in California, where he was found guilty on Tuesday of murdering Emmis Cosby, son of the actor Bill Cosby. Markhasev, a Ukrainian immigrant aged 19, was also convicted of attempting to rob Cosby as he repaired a flat tyre on a lonely road in January 1997. PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL J. CALLEFELD

Secret US hackers 'drilled for cyber-war'

Martin Kettle in Washington

UNDER the cover of strict secrecy, the United States is thought to be training a potent new offensive force — a squad of military and intelligence computer hackers who can bring America's enemies to their knees without a shot being fired in anger.

Almost all government statements about possible future cyber-wars have focused on the need for strong defensive measures against attacks from hostile governments or "cyber-terrorists".

Last month President Bill Clinton ordered that security be increased for national computer systems in the military, intelligence, governmental and banking sectors.

In contrast, little has been said about the means Washington is developing to launch cyber-measures against its enemies. No equivalent presidential directive is under consideration.

But it is inconceivable that the Pentagon and the CIA would neglect such a powerful weapon, and a trail of evidence suggests their plans are well advanced.

At a Senate hearing last month a Democratic senator, Carl Levin, asked the CIA director, George Tenet, whether the government was developing an offensive hacking capacity. Mr Tenet said the country "can rest assured that we're not asleep at the switch in this regard".

The Pentagon is understood to have carried out an internal restructuring to give greater urgency to offensive computer operations, and to have ordered military commanders to review their war plans with cyber-weapons in mind. An unnamed congressional source told the Washington Post this week that "some pretty aggressive thinking" was going on.

The extent of such capabilities is one of Washington's most closely guarded secrets, but sources say the government has explored ways of planting computer viruses or "logic bombs" in foreign net-

works to render them useless in wartime.

Among the options said to have been considered are shutting down computerised enemy air defence networks, shutting off power and telephone networks in major cities, feeding false data about troop and weapons deployment into enemy military information networks, and "morphing" television propaganda into foreign broadcasts.

The attractions of such capabilities are obvious, not least to a public that has been led to believe in "smart wars" which achieve their objectives without the loss of American lives.

But the policy "is at a fairly immature stage of development", according to the Washington Post's congressional source, and the Pentagon is unwilling to discuss it.

"You very quickly run into a security brick wall. The defence department has next to nothing to say about this in an unclassified form," the source told the newspaper.

The gap between what the technology is capable of and what it can deliver, especially in wartime, helps to explain the hesitancy. Large-scale computer attacks require enormous amounts of comprehensive information about rival systems, which are not easy to obtain or update.

"We like to think of electronic attack as the ultimate in precision weapons," said Vice-Admiral Arthur Cebrowski, a navy authority on such systems. "But these are not necessarily very precise instruments."

One of the many unknowns is the effect that feeding false information into one part of an enemy's computer system is likely to have elsewhere. There is also debate about the command structure for cyber-operations.

The intelligence oversight committees in the US Congress have pressed for greater clarity and for co-ordination between the Pentagon, the CIA and the FBI.

They want to ensure that any government-sponsored hackers do not interfere with rival agencies' operations and that they obey similar rules.

CNN star reporter fights for his job in Tailwind crisis

Martin Kettle in Washington

CNN television's most famous news reporter was fighting for his job last night as the crisis deepened over the network's retracted report that United States troops used nerve gas during the Vietnam war.

Peter Arnett was summoned to CNN's Atlanta headquarters to meet senior network executives who have already reprimanded him for his role in the disowned Operation Tailwind broadcast. The meeting followed criticism from CNN staff that Mr Arnett was let off too lightly when the programme's two producers were sacked.

Before the meeting yesterday Mr Arnett said he recognised he could be

fired in the wake of CNN's disavowal of the programme's claim that a secret 1970 mission into Laos had used sarin nerve gas against US defectors.

The meeting began at 8am yesterday and continued through the afternoon. Mr Arnett said he had been up until 3am writing an eight-page brief for network executives setting out his role in the report.

An inquiry last week found that the Operation Tailwind report, which was fronted by Mr Arnett and on which he wrote an article for Time magazine, was "unsustainable" after criticism of the journalists' sources and judgement.

Mr Arnett said yesterday he was brought in only at a late stage.

Some CNN employees be-

lieve the network, facing increased competition from

the producers sacked last week.

CNN's retraction has plunged the network into crisis: the sacked producers claim the network abandoned them because of high-level military pressure, while several journalists have denounced the decision to broadcast the allegations. CNN journalists held angry meetings on Monday, during which Mr Arnett defended his role by telephone.

Mr Arnett has been accused of concealing the extent of his involvement in the debate after it became clear he had conducted three interviews for the programme. Earlier, he had said he was brought in only at a late stage.

Some CNN employees be-



Peter Arnett: Staff objected he was let off too lightly

rival cable news channels, may have wanted to shield Mr Arnett, aged 63, who became CNN's most admired correspondent after the Gulf war. Others believe executives have made scapegoats of the producers.

"I hope they don't saddle me with the blame," Mr Arnett said yesterday. "I think it's a cop-out."

Israelis fear Palestinians plan unilateral declaration of a state

Julian Borger in Jerusalem

WHILE Israeli leaders shrugged off the United Nations vote upgrading the Palestinians' status yesterday, there was growing concern in Israel that the resolution was a dry run for a more dramatic step planned for next May — the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state.

Senior Palestinian officials say Yasser Arafat will declare statehood unilaterally on May 4 — on expiry of the five-year transition period envisaged in the Oslo peace accords — if there is no break in the deadlock in talks with Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The UN resolution taken on Tuesday enhanced the standing of the Palestinian delegation from observer status, giving it many of the rights accorded to states, such as taking part in General Assembly debates and co-sponsoring motions.

Mr Netanyahu dismissed the changes as "minor corrections" and Israeli officials pointed out that the Palestinians would still have no right to vote or submit candidates for office.

But Palestinian observers pointed to the size of the majority backing the motion: 124 member states supported it, while only Israel, the United States, the Marshall Islands and Micronesia opposed it. European Union countries all backed the resolution.

Mahdi Abdul Hadi, director of the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, said: "The vote was a test for us. It said yes, the world is for justice, and yes, the world is in favour of Palestinian statehood."

An Israeli official said: "I don't think there is any doubt that most of the UN would back a Palestinian state. The question for us is what borders would be recognised and would the US recognise it."

In a cover story entitled Palestine Rising, the Jerusalem Report quoted Mr Arafat's cabinet secretary,

Ahmed Abdul Rahman, as saying: "Netanyahu leaves us no choice. We'd prefer to negotiate independence by the deadline, but we cannot give him a margin for the stupidity of his policies."

Mr Arafat's Palestinian Authority has full or partial control over only 27 per cent of the West Bank at present and 70 per cent of the Gaza Strip, but a declaration of statehood next May would lay claim to all the Palestinian territory Israel has occupied since the 1967 war, including East Jerusalem.

Much would then depend on the Israeli reaction. The prime minister's spokesman, David Bar-Ilan, said such a declaration would "render the Oslo peace process null and void, so we'd take whatever steps we feel necessary to protect ourselves in those circumstances".

Mr Bar-Ilan stopped short of spelling out what retaliatory steps the government might take, but annexation of large areas of the West Bank and Gaza is widely believed to

be a contingency option, making a violent confrontation almost inevitable.

"There are two options. May 4 can be a declaration of peace or a declaration of war," Mr Abdul Rahman told Jerusalem Report.

US diplomats are believed to be trying to persuade Mr Arafat to postpone his plans for statehood, but Palestinian officials say Washington would have to offer far more progress in implementing the Oslo accords than has been achieved.

US-brokered negotiations on the next phase of Israeli troop withdrawals from the West Bank are said to be close to completion. But Mr Abdul Hadi said that would probably not be enough.

"Arafat does not have much time. He is getting old and if he does not act soon, maybe he will lose his chance to create a Palestinian state," he said. "If he does not do it, then other people might be ready to do it. Hamas is doing its homework too."

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Taliban edict bans the box

Zaheruddin Abdullah in Kabul

THE newest edict from the hardline Islamic Taliban army bans television, video cassette recorders, videos and satellite dishes.

"These video recorders and television are the cause of corruption in this society," Mohammed Qalamuddin, deputy head of the Taliban's religious ministry, said yesterday.

The ban was announced on Radio Shariat.

The Taliban shut down Afghanistan's only television station when it took control of the beleaguered capital, Kabul, in September 1996.

Since then it has issued a ban on video cassettes, but this has not been strictly enforced. Several homes also have satellite dishes.

Mr Qalamuddin said owners have 15 days to get rid of their television sets. After that, religious police — bearded men with automatic rifles — will conduct spot searches of properties and smash any television they find.

Anyone who defies the ban, he said, will be punished in line with Islamic law, although he did not specify what the penalties might be.

Since taking control of 85 per cent of Afghanistan, the Taliban army has imposed a harsh brand of Islamic law.

Taliban law bans women from working and girls from going to school.

It also outlaws most forms of light entertainment, and music other than religious music.

Men are beaten if they trim their beards and they are forced to pray in the mosques.

Other edicts issued by the Taliban ban women from wearing white socks and encourage people to paint their first floor windows black to prevent prying eyes from seeing women inside.

Women must wear the all-enveloping burqa. Anyone defying the rule is publicly beaten.

"We sacrificed 2 million people for shariat (Islamic) law and we don't care what the United States or the United Nations say," Mr Qalamuddin said. — AP.

General has isolated Abacha's hardline advisers, reports **Alex Duval Smith** in Lagos

Nigerian leader sacks cabinet

NIGERIA'S new military leader, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, yesterday disbanded the secretive inner cabinet which had ordered some of the worst abuses of Sani Abacha's regime. But the move is unlikely to quell the popular dissent sparked by the death of the country's most prominent political prisoner.

The sporadic street fighting, which has claimed at least 19 lives since the death on Tuesday of opposition politician Chief Moshood Abiola, died last night. But it appeared to have done so more in response to the football World Cup semi-final than to a live television address by Gen Abubakar, broadcast at the same time.

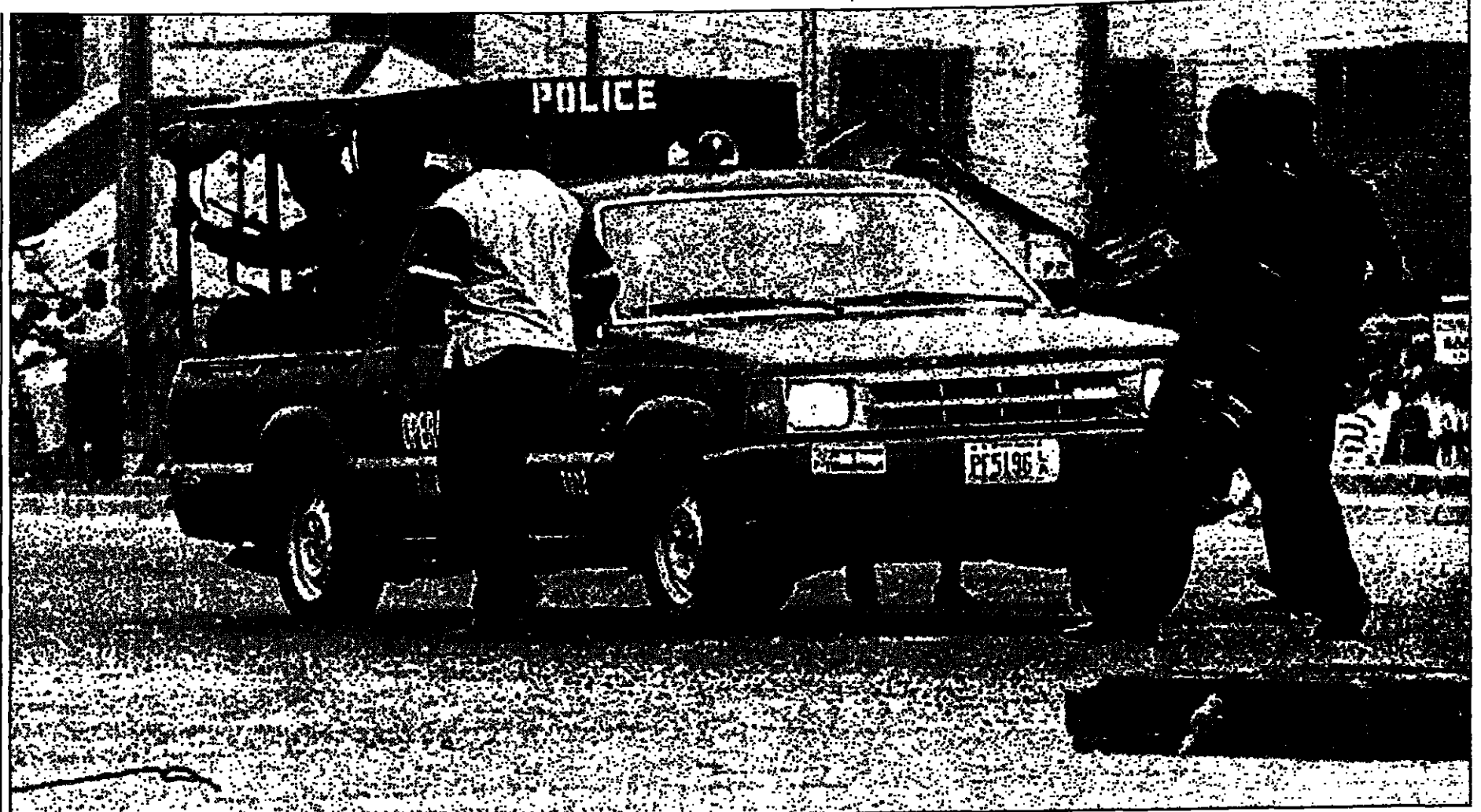
In a speech on Nigerian state television released to the media before broadcast, Gen Abubakar appealed for calm and said Chief Abiola had been on "the brink of his release from detention" when he died. Gen Abubakar said that the provisional ruling council would have met yesterday to decide whether to release him. Chief Abiola had been detained since 1994 for declaring himself president on the basis of an annulled 1993 election he is widely believed to have won.

"For me personally, and for the nation at large, this must be one of the saddest moments of our life. I never envisaged that I would be faced with such tragedies within the space of one month," said Gen Abubakar, who succeeded Abacha after his death on June 8.

Amid an overwhelming atmosphere of inertia and uncertainty, speculation continued last night about the post-mortem examination and funeral arrangements for Chief Abiola, who died of an apparent heart attack suffered during a meeting with the United States under-secretary of political affairs, Thomas Pickering.

The US delegation left the Nigerian capital, Abuja, without comment yesterday as Gen Abubakar, made his long-awaited address to the country.

The disbanding of Abacha's powerful, hardline cabinet is significant because it isolates a group of military and civilian advisers who presided over decisions such as the execution, in 1995, of the writer Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists. Yesterday's



Nigerians gather around a burning barricade in Lagos. Violence erupted after the death of Chief Moshood Abiola, who was seen as the key to democracy

PHOTOGRAPH: PETER OSE

move leaves intact the provisional ruling council which appointed Gen Abubakar and which is thought to favour moves towards more open government, in line with international calls.

Sporadic violence since the announcement of Chief Abiola's death continued yesterday in south-western Nigeria, including the economic capital, Lagos, the centre of the most vociferous opposition to the northern-dominated military, which has ruled Nigeria for all but 10 years of its 38 years of independence. In Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta, Chief Abiola's home town, protesters focused their anger on the Hausa ethnic group dominant in the north of the country — setting fire to tyres, pelting cars with stones and attacking the homes of

junta officials. In several clashes, police used tear-gas and fired bullets into the air to scatter protesters.

Even though the US state department said there was no reason to believe that Chief Abiola's death was "not the result of natural causes", his family demanded a post-mortem examination yesterday and rejected a government offer for his doctor to attend the official autopsy. His Lagos-based doctor, Dr Ore Falomo, said he would travel to Abuja to carry out the examination and would "tell the world today the cause of death. He asked for assistance from British and Canadian pathologists.

Many Nigerians have been quick to claim that Chief Abiola — whose release was seen as a key step towards de-

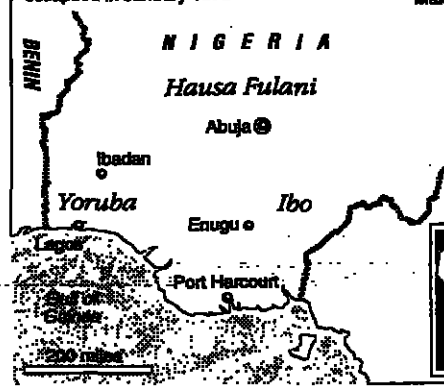
mocracy — was poisoned. Controversy had surrounded his hoped-for release since the United Nations Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, said he would have been willing to drop his claim to the presidency — something his supporters deny he would ever have done.

Gen Abubakar's speech last night was expected, as a mark of the end of an official month of mourning for Abacha. It is not clear to what extent it may have been altered in response to developments since Chief Abiola's death.

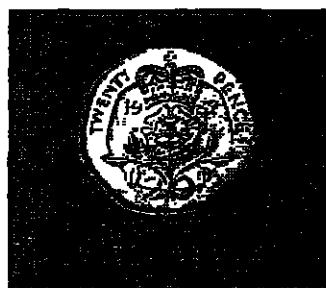
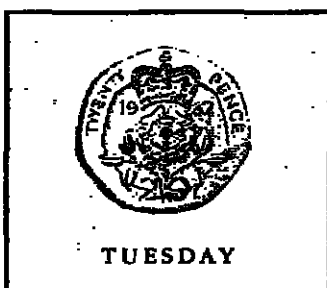
It was his release of several political prisoners and moves to shore up the Nigerian economy which in the past fortnight prompted visits by European Union, United States, Commonwealth and UN representatives.

Nigeria's ethnic fault lines

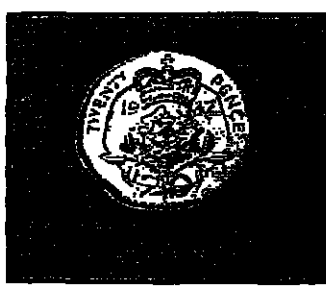
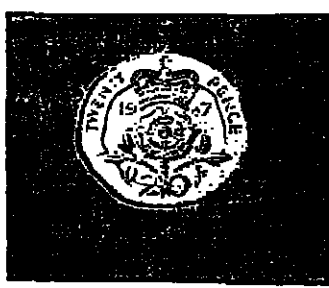
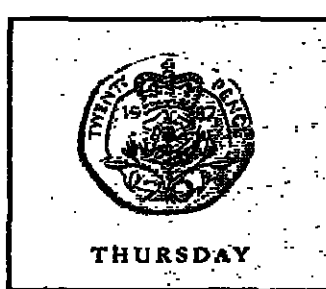
In 1967 the Ibo of the Eastern region declared the Independent State of Biafra. An estimated 2 million civilians died of starvation and 100,000 soldiers were killed or wounded before the secession of Biafra collapsed in January 1970.



Area: 923,770 sq km	Population: 107,455,000 (1997 est)
Population growth: 3.0% (1997 est)	Ethnic groups: Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Ibo, Tiv, Igbo, Ijaw, Ogoni
Religion: Muslim 50%, Christian 40%, indigenous beliefs 10%	Life expectancy: 54.65 years
Exports: Petrol and petroleum products 85%, cocoa, rubber	Major employers: 300,000
Labour mobility: 70-2 deaths per 1,000 live births (1997 est)	Source: CIA World Factbook



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High flyers meet the guru

Ian Traynor in Bonn

BEATIFIC smiles creasing their faces, herb teas at their fingertips, several hundred New Agers gathered in Bonn yesterday to listen to the Beaties' former guru and to plot the ideal world for the new millennium.

The octogenarian Maharishi Mahesh Yogi preached the virtues of the Veda by video-conference, and the Natural Law parties of the world sought to chart their way to power and "a new collective consciousness" across the globe.

"Transcendental meditation is the best means to combat stress and the illness and release of tension is infectious," said John Edgar, an US nuclear scientist who wants to be America's president.

"The greatest organising intelligence is nature's intelligence," said Geoffrey Clements, who has spent the past 20 years arguing the merits of peace, love and transcendental meditation in Britain and would like to be prime minister. He denounced Western politics as "driven by conflict and government driven by failure... Something reliable is needed. The knowledge is available."

The 600 delegates to the International Convention of Natural Law parties included ageing hippies, young New Agers, university boffins, political activists and peacekeepers from more than 60 countries.

Thomas Mullin, a Dublin solicitor and the Irish party leader, attributed the "astonishingly quiet" atmosphere of the elections to the presence in Belfast of an international crew of yogic flyers spreading their message of calm.

Other speakers took the credit for curbing Washington's crime rate by a quarter through Natural Law projects, and for generating a spirit of reconciliation in war-ravaged Mozambique. Some had plans to introduce peace to the southern Yugoslav region of Kosovo.



Jordi Pujol, leader of the Catalan party Convergència, greets supporters. Businesses are enraged by his efforts to force them to adopt the Catalan language. PHOTOGRAPH: CESAR RANGEL

Catalan quotas spark fear of Babel

A NEW law setting minimum quotas for the use of Catalan as a medium in cinemas and on radio stations in Catalonia has become the latest battleground in a long war over language and devolution.

The law drawn up by the regional government, eager to promote use of the regional language rather than mainstream Castilian Spanish, will require 50 per cent of new films to be shown in Catalan.

Private radio stations will have to broadcast half their output in Catalan and face heavy fines if they fail to comply. At least 25 per cent of songs played on music stations will have to be in Catalan.

The measure has drawn protest, not just from film companies, who balk at the cost of dubbing, but from an influential group of some 300 Catalan writers and artists, who feel efforts to promote Catalan have gone too far.

They have formed a pressure group, the Babel Forum,

and accuse the Catalan government of creating a divisive, two-tier system designed to favour Catalan speakers and discriminate against those — about 40 per cent of Catalonia's population — who consider Castilian their first language.

Their opposition has infuriated the champion of Catalan, the regional president Jordi Pujol, who leads the main nationalist party, Convergència.

"I wanted to go to the cinema," Mr Pujol said. "And in the whole of Barcelona there was only one film showing in Catalan — Mrs Brown. Now we are accused of linguistic aggression for trying to remedy that. What about the courts and police stations where business is invariably in Castilian?"

Language has been an important tool in Mr Pujol's campaign to achieve maximum devolution for Catalonia since he came to office in 1980. Initially he had the backing of almost all Catalans, including many who

have joined the Babel Forum. During General Franco's 40-year dictatorship, speaking anything but Castilian was frowned upon. Notices urged school children to "speak Christian" — synonymous in Franco's view with Castilian.

That changed after his death. Spain's 1978 democratic constitution gave Castilian pre-eminence as Spain's official language but recognised others, too, leaving regional parliaments to decide the balance.

Legislation passed in 1983 aimed to make Catalonia as bilingual as possible, through education in both languages and the mandatory use of Catalan in regional government offices. For many people it struck the right note. Some 95 per cent of the region's population now understand Catalan.

But Mr Pujol's latest efforts to build on that law have been controversial. Businessmen are angry at being forced to adopt Catalan in the workplace and label their products in Catalan.

"Workers are being deterred from moving to Catalonia by the language question," said an economist. "I write in Castilian," one Catalan novelist said, because

that way I can reach 400 million people around the world, rather than 6 million in Catalonia."

Spain's education minister, Esperanza Aguirre, joined the fray this week, criticising Catalan schools for teaching Castilian through the medium of Catalan. "Teaching of Spanish cannot be guaranteed in Catalonia," she said.

The issue often strains the parliamentary alliance between Mr Pujol and the minority conservative government in Madrid.

After the last election in 1996, when the prime minister, José María Aznar, sought to woo Mr Pujol, he made a point of referring to it.

"I speak Catalan in private at home," Mr Aznar said, trying to counter the impression left by supporters who had chanted: "Pujol you gnome, speak Castilian at home."

The language question is set to dominate regional elections in Catalonia next year. Mr Pujol faces a strong challenge from a former mayor of Barcelona, the socialist Pasqual Maragall, who feels the issue must be defused, or non-Catalan inhabitants will once again not vote at all.

The national Socialist Party's prime ministerial candidate, José María Aznar, also a Catalan, makes a point of using both languages, sometimes switching mid-sentence, whenever he is in Catalonia.

Romance language fit for kings

CATALAN is a romance language spoken in eastern and north-eastern Spain, chiefly in Catalonia and Valencia. *Adela Gooch in Barcelona writes.* Variants exist in the Roussillon region of France, Andorra, in the Balearic Isles, and Sardinia.

Catalan became the official language of the kingdom of Aragon in the 12th century, and the earliest written version dates from then. It has much in com-

mon with the Occitan language of southern France and Castilian Spanish.

Catalan literature flourished from the 13th to the

16th centuries, when it was eclipsed by Castilian, the court language. But a 19th-century revival — *Renaixença* — saw a literary flow-

ing, as did Franco's death in 1975. On April 23 each year Catalans mark their patron saint's day with gifts of books and roses.

Genesis 1, 1-2 in Catalan (left), Castilian (centre) and English

Al principi, Déu creà el cel i la terra. La terra era caòtica i desolada, les tenebres cobrien l'espai i l'espírit de Déu havia baixat sobre el aigua.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Paris fears its famous tower could soon fly US flag

Jon Henley in Paris

PARISIANS may have accepted McDonald's, Coca-Cola and the Y-Flare, but there is a limit, and it has clearly been reached with the news that the city's best-known symbol, the Eiffel Tower, could soon be taken over by American businessmen.

"It is inconceivable and unacceptable that the Eiffel Tower should become the subsidiary of an American company," fumed a city councillor, Philippe Domest, yesterday. "The mayor must prevent the transfer to foreigners of a monument that is an essential part of our heritage."

There is, in fact, no chance of Gustave Eiffel's 7,000-ton, 1,053ft high masterpiece erected for the 1889 Paris exposition actually falling into American hands. It is owned by the city of Paris and is not for sale. But United States investors could buy a majority stake in La Société Nouvelle d'Exploitation de la Tour Eiffel (Snète), the company that manages it.

"Do we really want to see our magnificent edifice run by the people who control Disneyland?" cried the popular daily *Le Parisien*.

"Will the Stars and Stripes soon be fluttering from the top of the Parisian landmark par excellence? Gustave would be turning in his grave..."

A cartoon in the tabloid newspaper *France Soir* showed two cigar-smoking Texan oilmen surveying with satisfaction a cascade of dollar bills shooting from the top of the monument.

"The Eiffel Tower for Uncle Sam!" the paper yelled. "We will not have



Gustave Eiffel's towering tourist attraction erected for the 1889 Paris exposition, which is now counting down the days to the millennium, faces a threat of being managed by Americans after the privatisation of a property lender. PHOTOGRAPH: REMY DELA MAISONIERE

this symbol of France run by gum-chewers." Jean Tiberi, the mayor of Paris, has written to the finance minister, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, urging the minister to "ensure that the interests of the city are fully safeguarded". The ministry said Snète's management was approved by the town hall, which had "every guarantee it needed" for

the tower's continued operation.

The threat to the tower, the first port of call for millions of visitors to Paris every year, stems from the state's forthcoming privatisation of Crédit Foncier de France, a property lender that is the principal owner of Snète, a property management firm which owns 70 per cent of Snète. After several French takeover candi-

dates dropped out, the only remaining bidders for Crédit Foncier are the General Motors pension fund and the billionaire Texan oil magnate Robert Bass.

A town hall spokeswoman played down the risk saying there were "a hundred ways" to avert catastrophe. "No one is about to allow Mickey Mouse to sit on top of the Eiffel Tower," she said.

Guerrillas now key to Kosovo peace plan

Ian Traynor in Bonn

THE international powers moved to integrate Kosovo Liberation Army guerrillas into the search for peace in the Serbian province of Kosovo yesterday, and revealed for the first time that they were drafting proposals for a form of home rule for the ethnic Albanian majority.

Meeting in Bonn, senior officials from the Contact Group — United States, Russia, Germany, France, Italy and Britain — conceded that the KLA was now such a significant factor in the conflict that it had to be included in negotiations.

But the Contact Group also threatened to take action to stifle the guerrillas' gun-running and fund-raising activities abroad if they spurned ceasefire efforts as a prelude to negotiating a settlement which was enjoyed by Kosovo for 15 years until it was brutally dissolved by President

Slobodan Milosevic of rump Yugoslavia in 1998.

"We have a situation today where the KLA has become an extraordinarily important force on the ground in Kosovo, controlling 30 per cent of the territory by day and probably more by night," a senior US official said. "Fully-fledged war has virtually become apparent."

Wolfgang Ischinger, the political director of the German foreign office, said: "We now have a new situation, especially because of the role of the militant Albanians, the KLA."

Last night the German foreign minister, Klaus Kinkel, went to Albania and Macedonia, Kosovo's neighbours, signalling that he would be meeting KLA representatives.

The statement from the Contact Group amounted to the first de facto recognition of the KLA as a player in Kosovo and represented a blow to Ibrahim Rugova, the elected pacifist leader of the ethnic Albanians.

The Contact Group stressed

that Mr Rugova remained the main interlocutor in the stalled negotiations, but noted that the "Albanian team for all these talks must be fully representative of their community in order to speak authoritatively".

"That's obvious code for including someone who can deliver the KLA vote," a Western diplomat said.

A few months ago senior US and German officials referred to the KLA as "terrorists", but they are now at pains to stress that, in the words of the US official, "they [the KLA] do not come close to meeting the criteria of terrorism".

In Geneva, however, Kosovo's neighbours, the KLA rejected Mr Rugova's policies and leadership, insisting that war was the only option unless Serb security forces withdrew from Kosovo.

Mr Kinkel and the US Bal-

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Mr Kinkel and the US Bal-

Indian court orders Murdoch's arrest

Suzanne Goldenberg in New Delhi on a crusade to stop the media mogul (right) screening 'vulgar' films on his TV network

THE seemingly unstoppable penetration of Indian homes by the satellite beams of Rupert Murdoch's Star television network has met an unlikely opponent in an obscure, self-appointed guardian of family values.

A New Delhi lawyer, outraged by "vulgar" films broadcast on the Star Movies channel, has convinced a court to issue a warrant for the arrest of the media mogul.

New Delhi's chief metropolitan magistrate, Prem Kumar, yesterday confirmed that a warrant had been issued against Mr Murdoch, for allegedly avoiding three summonses at his home in Australia from the lawyer, Anil Goel.

The four films — *The Jig-saw Murders*, *Dance of the Damned*, *Striped to Kill* and *Big, Bad Mama* — were

broadcast in November 1996. Although Mr Goel cannot recall the specific offending sequences, he said the films were vulgar, obscene and unfit for Indian audiences.

"Almost [total] nudity is there; in *Striped to Kill*, there are vulgar dances in every part. The postures of the ladies who are performing the dances as well as the music is bad, and moreover there is no theme in the film at all," he said.

The case comes up for a hearing on August 22.

Suing celebrities is common in India's courts, where litigants clamour for notoriety. Three years ago, a Bombay court ordered Mr Murdoch's arrest in a defamation case filed by a descendant of Mahatma Gandhi, who took offence at a gay activist's remarks on a chat show broad-



state-controlled television to Indian viewers.

Mr Goel is unmoved by arguments that the films were broadcast late at night, with warnings they contained potentially offensive material, and that famous Indian temples display carvings of topless women.

"A lady can't say: 'I am moving nude and you just close your eyes.' That is not good for society," Mr Goel said. "In India, when a person goes to a temple like Khajuraho, at least he is aware of the fact that he will find particular motifs over there, but the TV is basically for family viewing."

A spokesman for Star in Bombay refused to comment on the case.

In its battle to control the airwaves, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which heads India's governing coalition, are hostile to foreign satellite broadcasters because they are beyond their control. Last week India's junior information minister said he would like to ban cable channels from offering Pakistan's

Comment

Diary

Matthew Norman

ONCE again, this column comes to you with imprints of its new editor-in-chief Peter Mandelson, the well liked minister without portfolio. (Don't use that unfattering picture of me again. It wasn't funny, it wasn't clever, and I don't want to see it. Is that clear? PM). As we made clear yesterday, the storm in a teacup over Dolly Draper and Roger Liddle is not entirely finished. The media have had their fun, and it's time to move away from the froth and tittle-tattle of politics, and on to more significant things. (Excellent. When you're not being puerile, you really can be very good. Keep it up. PM) One last word, though. Let there be any doubt among those who did not hear the minister say so on Tuesday's World at One, Dolly is just a braggart with an inflated opinion of himself, but no status whatever within New Labour. He is a mere hireling who worked for Mr Mandelson in some junior capacity a few years ago. We cannot overstate this point. (Yes you can. Don't overplay your hand. PM)

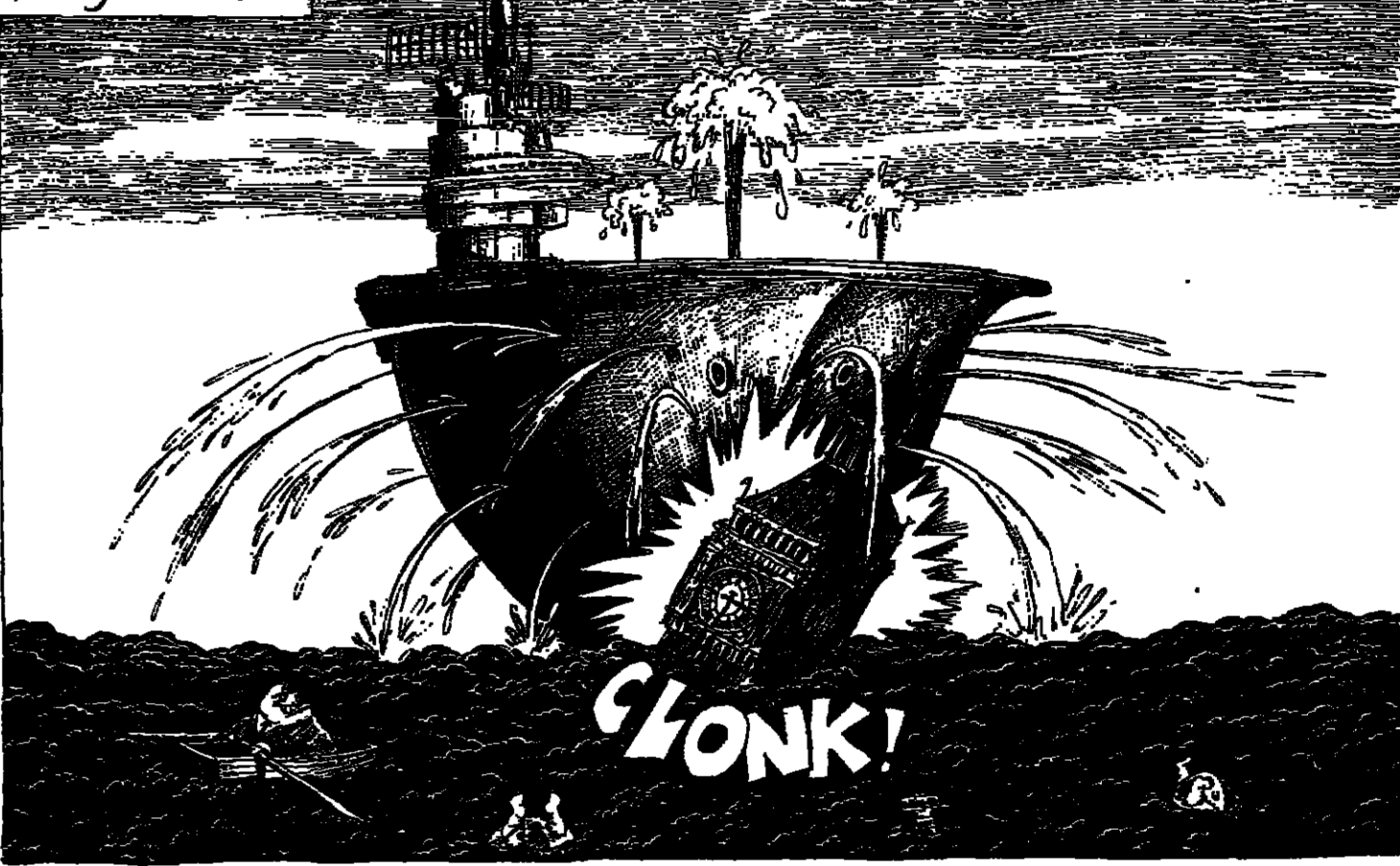
WHILE flicking through The Blair Revolution, that superbly written and intellectually rigorous tome by Mr Mandelson and a man he once met at a party (at a bus stop, actually. He asked me the time. PM) called Roger Liddle, my eye is caught by the preface. "Both of us owe a special debt," it reads, "to Derek Draper, who was closely involved with this project from the start and made a major contribution to the outcome at every stage. New Labour is fortunate indeed that it can boast a whole new generation with his quality of organisational energy, political commitment and realistic vision" — that's odd, I thought he was supposed to be a complete Walter Mitty? — "and it is to their political success that this book is dedicated." This is dated February 1996. Benjamin, Benjamin, a glass of water, quickly, and a couple of Panadol. PM)

MEANWHILE, the famous political realist can be seen on Saturday night on BBC's Hypocrits, discussing what a politician should do when caught in a scandal. On the show, recorded a fortnight ago, Dolly suggested that he would refuse to resign since he had done nothing wrong (ah, if only real life were like that) and would deal with the story by describing it as being "banged together and hyped". Sounds familiar.

A POWERFUL contender presents itself in the race for Most Amusing Press Release. It comes from the Conservative Research Department, and in it, director Danny Finkelstein, has an immensely tempting offer. For just £1,000 the CRD will send you a year's supply of... wait for it, wait for it... press releases. Only a few are very reasonable £2,000, but the press releases — documents with headlines such as "Inflation will keep on rising thanks to Chancery's State Maude", and "Labour's tobacco ban fudge — Ann Widdecombe" — are the real snip. It's not that the Tories are in desperate money troubles, or anything. It's just that these things are so intrinsically valuable. It would be absolute madness to give them away.

THE NEWS of the World enjoys a scoop. In an "exclusive" headlined "A wolf tooth about our stingy royals", Clive Goodman writes: "Prince Charles is worth a fortune — yet he uses a special gadget to squeeze out every last drop of toothpaste. A family friend revealed it's made from silver and stamped with his crest." Marvellous stuff. People say the News of the World isn't quite what it was, but I disagree. "Penny pinching Prince Charles is so thrifty that he even rationed the family toothpaste!" Roy Stockill wrote in the paper on October 1 1999. "Royal writers Unity Hall and Ingrid Seward say Charles has his 'little silver gadget' — inscribed with the Prince of Wales feathers — that rolls up his tube of toothpaste, making sure he doesn't miss the last squeeze..." See, on close examination it's just as good as ever.

Steady as She Goes!



Brazenly misleading the House, in a zealous culture of informal fixing

Hugo Young



TODAY the Cabinet gathers for its weekly meeting. The lynchpin of constitutional order affirms its place, against the spinners and the lobbyists, the peddlars and the flatterers, swimming daily around the business of government. This is the glory of the British system, the sacred buckle, a scholar once called it, that links the legislature to the executive.

But unfortunately it will not meet for long. If it follows the average of the Blair Government, it will break up after 50 minutes. Quite often in the past year, the famous meetings have lasted less than half an hour. This is what the Cabinet, at the deliberative heart of the constitution, has come to. It is not a wholly new development. Mrs Thatcher had little time for her Cabinet and found ways round the tedious business of listening to it. Cabinet committees and, more particularly, ad hoc meetings involving herself and a few chosen others, proliferated. But the present crowd have raised extra-parliamentary networking to a par with the conventional political process.

From Soho to Westminster, louche cannot roll round the system. Genuine collective discussion by the complete body of men and women who occupy the topmost places in our democracy, has seldom occurred, and then usually to address mini-crises provoked by inopportune plans that inflamed lobbies of parents, the disabled or suchlike sensitive groups. Of grand strategic decisions, nothing has been permitted.

Also receding is Parliament itself. Another rock all but disappears under the vastness of Labour's oceanic majority. The Prime Minister al-

most never votes there. He doesn't need to. His attendance, at the end of last week, amounted to 14 votes out of 325. His absences reflect the entirely instrumental view he takes of the House of Commons, in whose wisdom he shows no sign of being interested. Parliament exists to serve his mandate, and it will do so with absolute reliability.

The treatment of Parliament is a less dramatic, than the atomisation of the Cabinet. One of the great comic turns this June and July has been John Major denouncing from atop a supposedly high horse, New Labour's disrespect for Parliament. Major and Co were forced to respect the Commons simply because they didn't control it. Whenever they had the chance — the Scott Report is a memorable case — their manoeuvres showed contempt not only for Parliament but for the people.

That is the way of power. Had the Tories' majority been even a quarter as big as Blair's, nothing in their record suggests they would have been scrambling with Platonic enthusiasm to hear what anyone else had to say. "The Blair Government has greater temptations, to which it is duly succumbing. As the culture of informal fixing spreads, respect for formal institutions diminishes. The Commons Modernisation Committee, for example, is in process of handing the legislature deeper into the possession of the executive. Under the guise of rationalising antiquated rules, the Committee proposes new calendars and timetables converting the Commons to a four-day week which will help remove from the Government's opponents their one effective weapon,

which is time. Enabling MPs to have longer weekends with their families and constituents may seem very New Man and New Woman, not to mention New Labour. But, like recent ideas from the same committees about how to give Westminster more control over Europe, the result, if enacted, will be more pro-government than pro-voter.

A mixture of old Tory reactionaries and ambitious Labour neophytes, chaired, quite inappropriately, by Cabinet minister, is producing victory for the minister: an outcome so glaring that even the Speaker this week, unusually, opposed the draft reforms, with an acid reminder that any change should be directed to help MPs in their task of "scrutinising legislation, holding the executive to account and debating issues of national or local importance".

In the culture of New Labour it is more important to get a long weekend and a good night's sleep.

It is also more important to ignore any rival body of opinion. This week the House of Lords voted for the third time to remove an absurd anomaly in the Teaching and Higher Education Bill, whereby students at Scottish universities, where the courses normally last four years, will be exempt from paying the new £1,000 tuition fee in the fourth year — as long as they are Scottish or from any EU country except Britain. This is designed to put Scots on the same level as the typical three-year English-educated undergraduate, but it means that English, or Welsh, or Northern Irish students in Scotland will be forced to pay for the fourth year. There are rival

anomalies at work here. No system, as between the two countries, would make perfect sense. But at the last vote, on Tuesday, the Government lost without having to count a single Conservative or Cross-bench and Lib Dem opinion, whose amendment would have added in all £2 million to the education budget, was alone emphatic enough, yet is still to be emphatically rejected as some kind of affront to democracy.

This does not augur well for the likelihood of the Government creating a second chamber with sufficient legitimacy not to be ignored.

Mr Blair is very sore about the revelations in the Observer concerning what one might call the efficient part of the constitution — the networking that makes things happen.

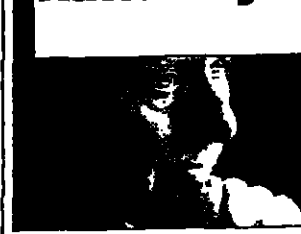
He even permitted himself to tell the Commons yesterday that "every" allegation "is untrue" — which is far from proven — and also to brazenly mislead the House about which bits of the evidence anyone had ever claimed was taped. He is that keen for his administration not to have even the faintest brush with inquiry. And it is perfectly true that nothing like corruption has been alleged, still less proved, against a public servant.

On the other hand, the bits of the constitution that are supposed to be efficient are in danger of becoming merely dignified. So full is the Government of zeal to act, and of conviction that it alone knows how to act, that everything else seems like an inconvenience which it has a democratic duty to sweep aside.

Hubris is an affliction fluttering far above and beyond disposable Derek Draper.

Chat hits the fan

Roy Hattersley



I AM perfectly prepared to believe that Roger Liddle who, when I knew him in the 1970s, was generally regarded as a pompous chump — is innocent of formal wrongdoing. It is clear that Downing Street will defend his reputation to the death, ideally the death of Derek Draper, who has been chosen as official sacrifice. Liddle has passed New Labour's ultimate integrity test. Having left the party at the nadir of its fortunes and joined the Social Democrats, he renewed his membership in time to participate in Tony Blair's victory celebration and eventually become one of the Prime Minister's senior advisers. No man of such impeccable taste could possibly have offered to smooth a businessman's path to minister and influential civil servants.

Ministers have been wheeled out to make splendidly spurious points in support. If there is no tape of him saying, "Just tell me what you want, who you want to meet and Derek and I will make the call for you", he did not say it — a defence from the brave new world of Blairism which ignores that, earlier in the week, he admitted saying "give me a call".

His excuse for the indiscretion, which Downing Street seems to have forgotten, was that he had drunk "several glasses of champagne". We must hope that he does not advise the Prime Minister on matters of vital national security, at least, not in the evening.

The second argument was that the Prime Minister cannot act until allegations are proved. Let us rejoice that the Labour leadership has discovered natural justice.

FOR years individual party members and, indeed, whole constituencies have been suspended on the basis of newspaper accusations. Some had to be reinstated after it was proved that they had no case to answer. But then few of them were Blairites. They were party members who, believing in democratic socialism, had stuck with Labour through the wilderness years.

And I don't if they earned their living in the dubious trade of lobbying, a disreputable occupation which should automatically disqualify its practitioners from employment by a radical administration. Mr Liddle was a lobbyist. Indeed the chat, from which he is now being extricated, took place at a lobbyist's party. Yet it seems that Downing Street raises no objection to his continued

association with such people. In Number 10's defence, it must be admitted that, during the last week, almost every serious newspaper has announced that lobbyists are necessary to a democratic society.

Almost every serious newspaper is wrong. Lobbyists are a political excrement.

Lobbyists it seems reasonable to assume, exist to lobby. In return for cash, they try to insinuate their employers' interests into government policy. The new breed openly peddles its influence and friendship with ministers. What do these young men have to offer except the distinction of being on first name terms with assorted secretaries of state? No half-sane executive would prefer a lobbyist's market judgement to the opinion of a reputable economic analyst. Companies who want to improve their image engage public relations consultants. Lobbyists have a distinct and disreputable function. Grease a lobbyist's palm and he or she will oil the wheels of government on your behalf.

Derek Draper — appearing on Tuesday's Newsnight — denied that lobbyists exploit old acquaintanceships to gain access to the Prime Minister's clients. He explained that his "inside knowledge" of the Chancellor's spending plans had been obtained by reading the Financial Times. Perhaps there are British company directors stupid enough to pay Mr Draper £250 an hour for reading the FT on their behalf. If they read his book, The Blair Revolution, they would not want to pay extra for his political judgement. But most of the lobbyist's clients expect to be introduced to a magic circle of mutual backscratches. It is like the masons without the oath and the rolled-up trouser leg. People who defend the

Mr Roger Liddle was a lobbyist. Lobbying is a disreputable trade

lobbyist trade can make a choice. They can claim that lobbyists do exert influence on behalf of those who pay them. Or they can insist that they are a confidence trick perpetrated on gullible companies. They cannot make a convincing case that lobbying contributes to the successful workings of the economy or the democratic process. Lobbyists are not the sort of people I would trust to take my dog for a walk.

Of course, it is possible to argue that people lobby for good causes. Jack Jones work for the pensioners immediately comes to mind. People like him are not paid for their services and rarely enjoy the privilege of talking to ministers. A million pensioners will testify that, unlike the brash young men in Sunday's allegations, they seldom succeed in persuading the government to adopt the policies for which they lobby.

Following the Americans up and down the Gulf scarcely justifies us spending billions on new aircraft carriers

Spent force

William Wallace

BRITAIN is less threatened today than at any time in history. Any future military threat to Western Europe would affect Italy or Spain, Germany or Austria, more immediately than Britain. Yet George Robertson's Strategic Defence Review says that Britain should go on spending twice as much on defence as Italy. Teachers and doctors, clamouring for the extra spending New Labour promised them, will want to know why.

When the review was announced a year ago, heavy stress was placed on it being "foreign-policy led", rather than pushed by the Treasury, as so often before. The Treasury has been kept at bay, but the rationale for the foreign policy which the new "expeditionary" orientation of

Britain's forces will serve has not been spelt out. The cost of a two-carrier expeditionary force is estimated at \$10-15 billion the same as the Eurofighter programme. "Hard choices" in public spending require powerful arguments for such investment.

One justification stresses Britain's historic role and responsibilities, and the contribution which our highly-professional forces can make to global order. We're good at defence, say ministers: we feel a responsibility for global order "because that's the sort of country we are". That is the country of Rule Britannia, rather than the re-branded Cool Britannia of the Blair government.

Defence capabilities give Britain global status, successive Labour governments have agreed. The postwar Labour government demonstrated this by

maintaining imperial bases and developing defence industries. Across the Channel our neighbours rebuilt their economies and societies instead.

Harold Wilson, who led the next Labour government, promised that Poland would be available to protect India from Chinese attacks, and clung to the East of Suez role until economic crisis forced belated withdrawal.

An expeditionary capability will give future British governments wider options to project power outside Europe. But this is

not enough to mount serious operations on our own. The hard questions are — with which partners, under what circumstances, and for what purpose?

Then there's the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf, with the Americans as partners and leaders. Rejection of closer European defence cooperation at the outset of the review, left the special relationship with the Americans defining the political context. Robin Cook painfully demonstrated during his visit to Israel, however, that British Middle East policy is driven by different priorities than American.



Following the Americans up and down the Gulf, grappling with the confusions and domestic lobbies which shape American foreign policy, is scarcely a firm basis for British strategy.

The hard questions of foreign policy which should have led the review thus remain. The Government is at last beginning to discuss a coherent European strategy. Nato is in the middle of defining a new "strategic concept", in which American negotiators are urging stronger European defence

integration. If Britain is to continue to spend much more on defence than its European partners, it should widen the debate on European burden-sharing to persuade our partners to take this as well as our contribution to the budget into account, and to justify this against the larger contributions other states make to international development.

It is not enough to argue that Britain has a duty to stand with the Americans in keeping global order — particularly when US Middle East policy is a mess. Nor should a forward-looking government invest so much in post-imperial status. After the defence review, we need coherent restatement of our foreign policy to justify its recommendations.

Lord Wallace is a Liberal Democrat defence spokesman

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'The English only know nine things about America, six of which are incorrect'

P G McLaughlin, Letters

New Labour, new defence

It's strategic, not radical

HISTORY records that generals often make the mistake of re-fighting old wars so it was predictable that the Government should bill its Strategic Defence Review as avoiding that error and looking boldly ahead. Future conflicts are hard to predict, but the thrust of George Robertson's announcement in the Commons yesterday is that Britain under Labour will be better prepared than before to meet whatever military challenges a messy post-Cold War world throws our way.

Despite embarrassment at the leaking of the White Paper, its contents have been long trailed and are fully in line with pre-election promises. Even without a crystal ball its shift of emphasis away from tank battles on the North German plain to a joint mobile force able to cope with at least two crises in different parts of the world — Bosnia as well as the Gulf — seems sensible.

Envisaging a role for UK forces both as peacekeepers and front-line troops, the review's logical centrepiece is the establishment of a rapid deployment force under a unified tri-service command and the ships and planes required to get them to the theatre of operations.

Two new aircraft carriers — mighty symbols of what defence buffs call "force projection" — are due to be built at a cost of several billions, though a 12-year lead time made them an easy target for Tory scepticism about the Government's true intentions. The White Paper thus has a far better claim to be called strategic than the last two

Conservative reviews. The first in 1991 was too soon after the end of the Soviet Union to be coherent and the second too much a Thatcherite slash-and-burn operation. Labour's effort shows the results of hard thinking and consultation far beyond Whitehall about how to cope without the dangerous certainties of East-West confrontation.

Specific items like the cuts to the Territorial Army may be unpopular yet what the review does generally makes good sense. What it does not do raises more difficulties. In a clever combination that maintains nuclear deterrence while making a nod towards arms control, the number of nuclear warheads carried on Trident submarines will be cut by half. Greater transparency on fissile stockpiles is welcome, though some had hoped for a stronger message on multilateral disarmament — not a meaningless gesture following the Indian and Pakistani nuclear tests. Britain's commitment to the Eurofighter has not wavered. Nato and its expensive expansion to include former communist countries remains the bedrock of strategic doctrine.

On the budget side, an overall cut of 3 per cent or £915m in real terms over the next three years hardly confirms Tory charges of a Treasury triumph that leaves bleeding stumps in the trenches — especially as the record shows defence spending reduced by a whopping 26 per cent between 1990 and 1997.

Mr Robertson's review dovetails neatly with Robin Cook's Foreign Office worldview — without giving more hostages to fortune by using the word "ethical". It makes laudable noises about preventive diplomacy and greater commitment to UN forces. And with problems like Kosovo looming it is right to talk about "discharging our responsibilities". These sort of positions are the best answer to those who wanted a more radical re-evaluation of defence policy, still costing

2.7 per cent of GDP, more than Sweden or Belgium spend certainly, but a cheap price for a permanent seat on the UN security council and the clout that carries. Some will be dismayed that Labour still wants Britain to punch above its weight and stay so close to the world's only superpower, risking becoming, in the words of one critic, "America's Gurkhas". But no-one should be surprised that this government has not questioned these strategic fundamentals.

Not so pure

Labour must get a grip

"THE Labour Government is always of two minds," one of the lobbyists at the heart of the cash-for-contacts scandal mused to the Observer. "It operates in a kind of schizophrenia. On big issues especially, they don't know what they are thinking." Well, no one can argue with that piece of expert analysis now — even if they haven't had to pay £8,000 a month to hear it. For Labour's response to the unfolding row over lobbying has been entirely contradictory. On the one hand, a somewhat rattled Tony Blair insisted at Prime Minister's Questions yesterday that "Not a single allegation in that Observer article is true." Yet, in the very next breath, Mr Blair promised to stamp out a problem whose existence he had just denied — rightly instructing the Cabinet Secretary to revise the rules governing contacts between lobbyists and government and "to strengthen them in any way that he thinks fit". So which is it? Is there a problem or isn't there?

The confusion does not end there. Labour promises it has nothing to hide, yet a junior minister storms out of a news conference when subjected to a probing question from

the BBC. The Prime Minister guarantees that the Observer story is all nonsense, and yet one of the lobbyists named by our sister paper has been suspended while another, Derek Draper, has been sacked. If not a single charge levelled by the Observer is true, why have the companies named taken such severe action against their employees? Would they really be punishing men who were, to recall Mr Blair's words of Tuesday, "purer than pure?"

Labour will also have to square Mr Blair's blanket denial with the awkward fact that several of the supposedly baseless charges in the story have been confirmed by the men accused. Karl Milburn of lobbyists GJW has owned up to passing on an embargoed select committee report, just as the Observer alleged. And Peter Mandelson did enjoy a sneak preview of Mr Draper's columns for the Express, just as the Observer said he did.

The geniuses of the Labour spin machine need to decide what their line is on this whole business. The all-out denial strategy is hardly sustainable, not with so many pieces of the story being firmed up with each passing hour. The move to beef up the rulebook on government-lobbyist contacts is welcome but, as William Hague's spirited performance yesterday proved, Labour needs to get a grip on this row soon: it's beginning to cause damage.

Vote for rote

Put calculators in their place

ELEVEN times 11, everyone? In a mechanical age, mastery of the times tables is not an anachronism. Seven times eight? Basic mental arithmetic is part of the routine equipment of the averagely-educated person. We

live and die by mensuration, by fine calculus of risk and probability. It's a quantitative world: if you don't know how the numbers run it passes you by. Like wearing a clean pair of pants in case you get knocked down, it's a matter of being prepared. You simply never know when a lurking cost-monger is going to be offering five apples for 90 pence or 10 for £2 or when a self-assessment tax form with Allowances That Reduce Taxable Income To Be Deducted is going to drop on the mat. As for those designer cafes, somebody needs to know what's the right change if you hand over £2 for one 99p latte and a 89p almond Danish. There is, in other words, a functional argument for knowing how to add, subtract, divide and multiply. Of course machines can do sums and, yes, it is hard in supermarkets where prices are bar-coded. But the capacity to do simple sums in your head quicker than the time it takes to fumble a pocket calculator from your purse, switch it on and punch in the numbers is useful — and basic arithmetic is a pre-requisite for understanding what the machine is telling you anyway.

There is a cultural argument, too. Arithmetic skills are surely part of the common inheritance. In response to David Blunkett's announcement yesterday effectively banning the use of calculators in classes for pre-16s, teachers demanded discretion. Of course classroom teachers know best when and how they introduce young children to calculating machines. But they would also recognise that reciting tables together is a classic school experience, a demonstration that (sometimes) there is no alternative to learning by rote, that there is a corpus of technique and knowledge which just have to be mastered, and singing out 121 and 56 (see above) is a relatively painless way of acquiring it.

Letters to the Editor

Sleaze, lies and audiotape ...

YOU are right to say that we demanded a tape recording of the disputed conversation between Roger Liddle and the Observer (Blair warns "we must be pure", July 8). But we did not do so because of any desire to see changes to the basis on which journalists may mount investigations. We did so because Greg Palast, claimed to have such a tape. He was asked on Radio 5 if he had the disputed remarks on tape and he replied: "I have that for certain."

If that was a slip of the tongue, he could have set the record straight the moment the Observer received our first letter asking for a tape and transcript. Instead, it took several letters to the Observer, several direct challenges by Clive Soley MP in debate with Mr Palast on Newsnight, and overnight reflection before the paper admitted there was no tape. Alastair Campbell, Chief Press Secretary, 10 Downing Street.

READ that the Prime Minister's spokesperson decided the contemporaneous notes of the Observer journalists did not provide adequate proof. Is this not the same spokesperson who told a select committee there was no need to tape his daily briefings as the room was full of journalists taking contemporaneous notes? Teresa Pearce, Erith, Kent.

YOUR profile of the journalist at the heart of the lobbying scandal (Investigator under, July 8) makes me wonder what I am supposed to make of the morality which offers for our admiration a man like Gregory Palast, whose job appears to be to tell

lies to people, get them pissed and, when they are in a particularly boastful mood, entrap them into indiscretions which are then sold to a newspaper. Peter Smees, Norwich.

ALTHOUGH nearly all the claims are directed against lobbyists, the thrust of your massive coverage seems to be directed at the Government. Yet the only alleged offence of anyone in government is that an adviser allegedly said at a party he would help make some introductions for a lobbyist's clients. If true, this would warrant a reprimand, but hardly justify the acres of coverage. But it seems to fit into a larger agenda of establishing the Guardian and Observer as the friendly-but-critical media opposition to the Government. This is a reasonable goal.

playing the access card to turn bullshit into banknotes

THE ability to turn bullshit into bank notes has always been an element in political lobbying. The fact that a very small minority of those who work in the industry make it their stock in trade should not cause Parliament or the public to follow the foolish advice contained in your Leader (Turn off the access, July 8). Nothing could damage the cause of good or open government more than for ministers to cocoon themselves in Whitehall safe from outside opinion, information or advice.

Of course there should be a code of conduct for lobbyists, backed by a register and policed by Parliament. The fact that we do not have such a system in place lies with the

but those of us at the sharp end of politics are frustrated by the way you help build the impression that all parties are mired in sleaze, despite the absence of any minister or MP from the sleaze or MP Nick Palmer MP, House of Commons.

SPARE a thought for the victims of this affair. Each now knows that someone has been making £250 per hour for being intimate with them — and with 16 others on the side. Ian Short, London.

YOU carried a list of lobbyists with close Labour connections (July 7). Most of your readers will probably not have noticed the small print, which reveals that the list was provided by Conservative Central Office. This may explain why my name appears on the

unwillingness of Parliament to act for over a decade. Tom McNally, Vice-chairman, Shandwick, London.

THE controversy over Derek Draper is in danger of swamping the useful role that parliamentary advisers play for many charities, unions and businesses. There is a dangerous notion being put forward that if there were no lobbyists everyone would have equal access to Parliament and Government. This is patently not the case. Legitimate lobbyists act as channels of communication, empowering people to be heard, not by claiming special influence. Few people, politicians included, have a detailed

list. I am not a lobbyist. My job is consultant on public relations and media strategy, a distinction the Guardian actually acknowledged at the time that I left my post as chief media expert for the Labour Party. David Hill, Director, Bell Pottinger Good Relations, London.

HAVE just read Polly Toynbee's article on Peter Mandelson (Canker in No 10, July 8). Wow. Ouch. William Allen, Oshott, Surrey.

IN My Media column Peter Mandelson said he was "fascinated" by the Daily Express. Strange that now he is reported as not having time to read Derek Draper's column in the same newspaper. Martin Walker, London.

knowledge of parliamentary procedure, how the EU works or of the civil service. MSP Political Staff Group, Beckenham, Kent.

WHY is it that we are outraged that Derek Draper might sell "access for cash" when politicians have been doing it for years? My company frequently gets invitations to fork out thousands of pounds for tables at political fund-raisers on the promise that the PM/Chancellor/Peter Mandelson will be present. If politicians are now throwing up their arms in horror, maybe it is only because they want to maintain their monopoly. Ben Rich, Luther Pendragon, London.



United States, divided opinion

JONATHAN Freedland (Hall of Fame, July 8) is right to laud the English radicalism of Palast but two points illustrate the limited application of that tradition. Firstly, the Founding Fathers, all men of property (including slaves), despite their fine words were concerned with ensuring the real levers of power did not fall into the hands of the ignorant mob. Secondly, many American politicians have too often seen themselves not as "on nine" to the people, but for sale to the highest bidder. David Sutherland, Saddington, Glos.

THE kind of populist "direct democracy" extolled by Freedland, whether it involves bully boy efforts running sadistic boot camps, prisons being turned into capital punishment slaughterhouses to sate public bloodlust, or the creation of bizarre monosexual societies can be alternatively glossed as a particularly dangerous species of mob rule, arising from an intellectually spurious identification of liberty with consumer demand. In such an atmosphere, politics becomes the instincts of the electors. It is worth asking whether the ultra-individualistic conception of liberty Freedland seeks to promote is worth the deep damage it is likely to wreak on the wider community. Freedland has bullishly puffed what he perceives as the virtues of such unconstrained liberty; those on the true liberal-left should now ponder its darker implications. Neil Saunders, London.

SO it's cool that real political power is wielded locally, simply because it reflects the will of the people? But the will of the people at state level is precisely what enabled slavery to survive in the US for a generation after it was abolished in the British

Two heart attacks and a riot: Nigeria's tragi-comedy

SHAKESPEARE could not have conceived a greater tragi-comedy than the events unfolding in Nigeria: the dramatic exit of the two major protagonists, Abacha and Abiola, within weeks of each other (Abiola death sparks Nigeria panic, July 8). Sworn enemies in life but seemingly united in death by a common affliction, a heart attack. Abiola died not of natural causes but for a cause — the right of every citizen to aspire to the highest office in the land and, if he achieves his aspiration by fair means, not to be denied his reward by foul means. If the northern Nigerian leaders were not prepared to accept the victory of a southern Nigerian in the last presidential elections, is it reasonable to expect that the southerners will accept the victory of a northern Nigerian in the next elections, whenever they may be? Defa Ogun, London.

CHRIS McGreal writes that Abiola lost the support of the north when he accused the region of culpability in the election annulment. This is a simplistic rearguard of ethnicity as the central factor in Nigerian politics. If indeed the problem is just one of finding a unifying voice acceptable to all parts of the country, is this going to happen "with handicapping any new government" as suggested by McGreal, when it did not happen with the winner of a free and fair election? Nigerians knew that Abiola was no messiah when they elected him. They saw in him an opportunity to deal with the age-old problem of military adventurism. McGreal should understand this if he wants to know who was afraid of Abiola. It is certainly not the people who voted for him. Dr Kayode Fayemi, Director, Centre for Democracy and Development, London.

Cryptic Spice

SOME £145 million for the "streets tsar" to get rough sleepers off the streets? What's wrong with building 2,000 flats at £50,000 each to house them? J Smith, Walton-on-the-Naze, Essex.

THE proliferation of tsars (drugs, streets) will eventually require a tsar's tsar. Could Ms Gabor be appointed? Adam Sandelson, London.

WHICH is more worrying: that The Spice Girls have made it into the Cryptic Crossword, or that I know enough about them to solve the clues? Sue Hornaby, Southport, Merseyside.

HOW do we know that 10 per cent of British men are impotent? Is there an opportunity here for some attractive young researchers to make their reputations? Martin Rathfelder, Manchester.

ANYONE watching every World Cup programme will at the end have endured four days of punditry. Evert Hicks, Foulton-le-Fyde.

Drumcree leads the Orange Order into a cul-de-sac

IN declaring their "civil rights" to march anywhere they please in Northern Ireland, the Orange Order are claiming a freedom that they are only too willing to deny the Catholic population (Ulster crisis, July 8). It was because the Orange mobs were attacking Catholic civil rights marchers in the late 1960s that the Government had to send in the British troops in the first place. How the Orange Order can claim to be loyal British subjects when they only obey the British laws that suit their own prejudices is beyond me. Terry Taylor, Macclesfield Forest, Cheshire.

CAN the same right to control organisations using the road outside one's house be extended to the rest of the country? I object strongly to roads being used by competitive runners and cyclists. These people are triumphant in their showing of that they can or cycle faster, and hence are in some way better, than the rest of us. J V Royle, By Beaulieu, Inverness-shire.

LARGE numbers of Orange-Lovers in Drumcree on a weekday. Do they not have jobs to go to? And if not, does

hanging a drum in a field count as "available for, and actively seeking, work"? Perhaps withholding dole payments would be the quickest and cheapest means of persuading them to go home. G Stanley, Sheffield.

WHY don't they turn the Garvaghy Road into a cul-de-sac? Malcolm Brown, Glasgow.

ARE there any Orange-women? Mark Jarvis, Bath.

Rape: the real questions

CONGRATULATIONS to Katharine Viner (Rape Crisis, G2, July 6) for putting the record straight. Of course some women feel rape was the worst thing in their life and some don't, but that isn't the point. What strikes me about the debate over Fay Weldon's remarks is that, yet again, the focus is on women. This time it isn't what we wear and how we provoke men, but how rape affects us. Yet it isn't women

who rape, so when can we begin the real debate? Kate Coell, Campaign to End Rape, Sale, Cheshire.

WHEN Katharine Viner asserts that Fay Weldon is a novelist who "... everyone calls a feminist but no one can remember why", she forgets that there are some of us who actually do read the books that Fay has written about the

richness and pains of women's lives, and who don't just rely on articles by journalists to tell us what we think about the feminist credentials of other women. Annly Campbell, Sutton Coldfield, W Midlands.

KATHARINE Viner's statement that all men are potential rapists is not true. It is an "evident truth" that there are a large number of men not interested in women sexually. There is a significant number

of men not interested in sex with anyone. And there are many who, while being very interested in sex with women, do not rape because we don't bait women. Tom Crow, Hillingdon, Middx.

RAPE is a horrible crime. But why must it always be an expression of "patriarchy"? Why can't it simply be an expression of the fact that some people are prepared to use violence to get what they

want — whether it's property or sex — coupled with the biological fact that men can take sex from women by force, but generally not vice versa? How does rape as the ultimate act of male power over women explain the existence of male-on-male rape? The risk of violence is an unfortunate fact of life, but more so for men than for women: it is primarily men who are the victims of violent crime. Cathy Young, Middletown, New Jersey.

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Moshood Abiola

Bearer of Nigeria's hopes for democracy

THE extraordinary life of Moshood Abiola, who has died aged 60, apparently of a heart attack, while meeting an American delegation, matches the tumultuous pageant of Nigeria's political life in which he played such a pivotal role.

Abiola first came to prominence as an accountant for the American multinational ITT's Nigerian offshoot, which he joined in 1968. He developed a knack for getting contractual cheques signed by the highest ranking military officers under the 1970s regime of General Murtala Muhammad. This relationship with the military hierarchy both secured Abiola control of ITT's Nigerian operations and gave him the platform to pursue his always flamboyant ambitions.

His direct influence on the political process began with the constitutional conference of the late 1970s. The then military government had lifted the ban on political parties and Abiola became chairman of the Ogun state branch of the National Party of Nigeria in the time of the Second Republic, civilian rule which lasted until the end of 1983.

At the conference he donated pocket calculators to all participants. His political career began to flourish with the launch of his second newspaper group in 1980. He hoped it could influence his campaign for presidential

nomination within the then ruling National Party. It was in that brief phase of democratic government between 1979 and 1983 that Abiola became a truly public figure, known for his extraordinary generosity in building schools and financing the education of many children of the elite, as much as for his penchant for marrying more than the usual numbers of wives allowed by Islamic custom. Tension between the different families of which he was head was something he later began to regret.

Abiola's ambition never fal-

tered, and when his friend General Ibrahim Babangida took power in 1985 he had access to the innermost machinations of the military as they moved cautiously and uncertainly into the new phase of democratic transition that eventually unfolded in June 1983.

When Abiola won presidential nomination for the Social Democratic Party in 1983 he campaigned convincingly and tirelessly, his "rags to riches" progress serving as an inspiration for ordinary Nigerians.

Before long he was engulfed in the Nigerian political crisis. His jurisdiction by General Sani Abacha in 1994, daring to claim the mandate

he had won the previous year, removed him from public life but in no way diminished his potential to cross the ethnic divide.

Abiola was born in poverty in Abeokuta in the south-west of Nigeria, and was the first of his father's many children to survive. He was a Muslim and a Yoruba, a member of one of the largest — currently 25 million — ethnic groups in the country. Educated at the Baptist Boys' High School in his home town, he went on to study accountancy at the University of Glasgow from 1960 — the year that Nigeria

portfolio of foreign investments.

By June 1994 Abiola's challenge to Babangida's successor General Sani Abacha had confirmed his emergence as a symbol of the democratic movement. He declared himself president in defiance of the military at a clandestine ceremony, and soon after was arrested and charged with treason. Within a year it was reported that Abiola was in solitary confinement, and had lost more than six stone. His physician reported that he had been cut off from the news, that he was no longer aware of the time or whether it was day or night. Meanwhile the senior of Abiola's three official wives, Kudrat, was gunned down by "unidentified gunmen".

Abiola was no saint but his love for Nigeria and all Nigerians was unquestionable. The sporadic reports of his poor health, and the lack of treatment provided by his captors over the past four years, have been disquieting. The country he hoped to save from disaster is almost certainly once again on the brink.

His first wife Simbiat died in 1962. He had 18 unofficial wives and more than 60 children.

Richard Syge

Chief Moshood Kashimawo Okunla Abiola, politician, born August 24, 1937, died July 7, 1998

This obituary appeared in later editions yesterday



Abiola... his 'rags to riches' story inspired many across an ethnically-divided nation

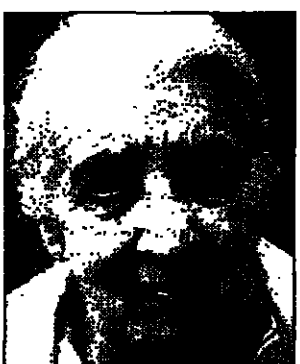
He was potentially the first southerner to hold the Nigerian presidency in a civilian government. His ousting provoked a political crisis the country has been struggling to overcome

Victoria Armstrong

Living with the nomads of Nilgiri

DURING a visit to India in the early 1980s, Victoria Armstrong, who has died aged 88, met Dr S Narasimhan, who had dedicated his life to the nomadic tribal people of the Nilgiri Hills in southern India. The development of tea estates had brought in new communities, and left the tribes impoverished. The doctor, meanwhile, had set up the Nilgiris Adivasi Welfare Association (Nawa). Armstrong was deeply moved. So much so that she prematurely retired from her post as a schools inspector, and in 1982 went to live in Kotagiri.

She was never to return to England. She bought a house, and, using her British pension, worked as a voluntary social worker with Nawa, as a secretary, an accountant and fundraiser. She helped with the Kotagiri Women's Co-operative Cottage Industry Society. Under her influence Nawa flourished. Adept at locating the causes — and solu-



Armstrong... tribal tributes

tions — to problems, Armstrong concentrated on the basic needs, health, nutrition, education, income-generating projects.

She was a compelling speaker, a fierce defender of human rights — and extremely kind. She incorporated and co-ordinated the work of the tribal people, helping train and develop latent skills through learning by

doing. She knew the importance of identity, and the community became increasingly self-reliant, and its members mutually supportive. Her aim was not to change the people, but to help them to recognise and develop their own abilities.

Projects, some begun by Dr Narasimhan, expanded. Nawa focused on medical and health care; there was a farm colony for workers formerly in bonded labour; Christian Children's Fund-sponsored education of tribal children, and tea and coffee plantation projects to develop self-sufficiency.

There were tribal hospitals, creches and nutrition centres. Immunisation schemes were introduced, and sickle cell anaemia research. As far as possible the projects and Nawa's committee were staffed and organised by tribal people. Tribal women were trained as health workers and nursery assistants to operate in widely scattered, remote areas.

Victoria Armstrong was born in London and won a scholarship to James Allen's Girls' School, Dulwich. In 1930 she gained her London University teaching certificate from Furzedown Training College. From 1931-44 she taught in schools in London and Kent. Through evening classes she took an honours degree in botany with zoology from Birkbeck College, London University, in 1935 and during the war gained an English literature diploma from King's College, London.

Briefly, early in the war, she was recruited to Kent but, back in London and finding no local schools, she opened a class for boys and girls of mixed ages and abilities — which became a school — at Eltham Girls' High School, SE18.

As she wished, she was cremated in the tribal way. Her ashes were immersed, he added, "in the place called Bhavani, where three rivers meet."

remained in this job until her fatal visit to India.

In 1976, she was awarded the MBE for her work in India. In 1996, a special birthday tribute was held for Victoria Armstrong by her tribal friends and colleagues. Thousands attended, and a video of the occasion shows the affection and respect of the people of the hills for their English supporter.

"We are unable to bear the death of Madam Armstrong," Nawa's honorary secretary Mr Alwas, a tribal man, commented. "As a child, I knew her since 1965. How could we forget those golden days?"

As she wished, she was cremated in the tribal way. Her ashes were immersed, he added, "in the place called Bhavani, where three rivers meet."

Sally Young

Victoria Daisy Armstrong, teacher and social worker, born November 3, 1908; died May 16, 1998

Letters

Val Wilmer writes: So television viewers loved Alf Garnett for his prejudices, did they? I have yet to meet any black person who found Johnny Speight's horrid bigot remotely amusing. As a woman, I, too, always switched off when Alf came on the box; it just was not funny.

Till Death Us Do Part has long been a subject for debate, but the fact is that Speight's "irony" was a little ahead of its time for people who were still being routinely abused in the street. His autobiography, the source for many of the quotes in your obituary (July 6), is full of the casual racism voiced by East End musicians of the period, their proclaimed love of black music notwithstanding.

His comments about Ray Ellington and Edmond Ros are typical: "not only couldn't act, they could hardly talk proper."

Well, although I only came across Ray Ellington in passing, this is untrue. I can assure readers that anyone who has ever met the redoubtable Mr Ros would know he has no trouble at all in expressing himself, forcefully and articulately.

Jacques Pilhan

The image of the Elysée

JACQUES Pilhan, who has died of lung cancer aged 54, acted as a consultant, an "image consultant" for both President Mitterrand and for President Chirac with useful information, so that the presidential candidate would refer to a mysterious adviser "from the left".

It has never been proved that it was Pilhan who organised the media torpedoing of a story which told of Balladur, in southern France, hitching a lift from a woman after his helicopter had made an emergency landing. Back in Paris Balladur had sent her a bunch of roses. But inquiries set in motion by Pilhan revealed that the lady was a cousin of one of Balladur's advisers on the trip. There was some amusement about the hitchhike that never was.

After the election of Chirac Pilhan stayed on, and formed a remarkable team with the President's daughter, Claude, becoming a more general adviser. He, with Claude, became very critical of Prime Minister Alain Juppé, and they advised against the elections of 1997 which ended in victory for the socialists. It was shortly after he had been proved right that Pilhan's illness began.

HE WAS a mysterious person, rarely seen, often apparently absent from Paris, living in Pithiviers and having a house in Siere Leone. "The pope of communications" as he was called, was distanced by politicians and officials. He was privileged, he was expensive, the extent of his influence was unknown. Apparently he enjoyed this. "The truth is on the screen, the reality is in the poll," he once wrote. He was very modern.

He is survived by a wife and child.

Douglas Johnson

Jacques Pilhan, publicist, born 1943; died June 28, 1998



Bill Brooks (right) and Churchill at the 1950 General Election declaration at Woodford

Bill Brooks

A comrade at arms

BILL Brooks, who has died aged 87, was a one-time general secretary of the Young Communist League, a wartime Communist Party activist in the Royal Fusiliers, and ran as the Communist candidate against Winston Churchill in Woodford at the 1950 General Election. That was the sort of defiant gesture that characterised Bill's life. He won 827 votes, Churchill got 37,339.

It was not his first hustings experience. On the troopship that took him to India in 1944 he organised lectures on current affairs. This culminated with an election, in which the Communist candidate, Bill, topped the poll.

Born in Bristol, he was apprenticed at the Mount Stewart dry dock, but he emerged into the world of the great depression. He joined the

Labour Party at 15, and later Sir Stafford Cripps's Socialist League, organiser in the Durham coalfield and then in 1938 the Daily Worker's circulation manager. He was later the paper's City, and motor-ing correspondent.

Bill was a born organiser. When he moved to Sheffield on his retirement, he and his wife Gladys set up "Neighbours for Labour" an informal Labour Party gathering. He had married Gladys, a Lancashire lass, in 1943. There was a lifelong partnership of comrades-in-arms. With their daughters Sally and Jenny they were also active in the Woodcroft Folk. His family survives him.

Sam Russell

Bill Brooks, Communist, born May 21, 1911; died June 10, 1998

came YCL general secretary. In the 1960s he became a CP active in the Durham coalfield and then in 1968 the Daily Worker's circulation manager. He was later the paper's City, and motor-ing correspondent.

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Sam Russell

Bill Brooks, Communist, born May 21, 1911; died June 10, 1998

CORRECTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS

IN OUR Analysis on Select committees, Page 17, July 7, we said, "The system was so flawed that Jerry Hayes, a health committee member, even leaked a report to Virginia Bottomley, the Health Secretary..." We should have said, "leaked a report to William Waldegrave..." since he was Health Secretary at the time. Apologies.

IN OUR coverage under the heading, The Lobbying Scandal, we said in a report on Page 5 yesterday, that Gregory Peck last had "briefed Jack Straw and John Cunningham". He did not brief Jack Straw. We meant to say Jack, not John, Cunningham. Apologies.

THERE WERE discrepancies

between our report of the death of Roy Rogers, Page 12, July 7, and the obituary which appeared on Page 16, the same day. In the report we said he was 86. In the obituary we said he was 85. We now incline towards 86. In the report we said that Dale Evans had a horse called Buttercup. In the obituary we said it was called Buttercup. Buttercup was right. In the report we said Rogers and Evans starred together in the Roy Rogers Show from 1951 to 1967. In the obituary we said the show ran for six years from 1961. The obituary was correct, although repeats of the original shows continued to be run for many years. Finally, in the obituary, in quoting the

lyrics of a song associated with Rogers (and his horse, Trigger), we omitted the word "wonderful" from the line, "He's honest and faithful right up to the end, that wonderful one, too, three, four-legged friend."

WE PERSISTED in peddling peddle instead of pedal. On Page 9, G2, July 6, ignoring earlier corrections, we referred to peddle pushers in an article headed, Soft shoe shuffle. The things on each side of a bicycle are pedals.

IN AN ARTICLE ON Page 7, G2, June 29, about women at Cambridge University, we quoted some remarks by Rosemary Beresford, who read English at Newnham, from 1934

to 1937. We said she is 71. She is 82. We quoted her as saying, "There was prejudice against women students." She has asked us to make it clear that she said, "There was no prejudice against women students," the only exception being the fact that she began all his lectures, "Gentlemen."

It is the policy of the Guardian to correct errors as soon as possible. Please quote date and page number. Readers may contact the office of the Reader's Editor by telephoning 0171 339 6689 between 10am and 5pm, Monday to Friday. Surface mail to Readers' Editor, The Guardian, 119, Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3ER. Fax: 0171 259 5897. E-mail: reader@guardian.co.uk

Birthdays

John Ainsley, tenor, 36; David Bohr, television presenter, 34; Judith Brown, Beit Professor of Commonwealth History, Oxford University, 54; Steve Coppell, football manager, 43; Ben De Haan, jockey, 39; Kate Garner, fashion photographer, 44; Tom Hanks, actor, 37; Sir Edward Heath, Conservative MP, former prime minister, 82; John Heath-Stubbins, poet and lecturer, 80; David Hockney, painter, 61; Derek Lewis, former director, Prison Service, 52; Paul Merton, comedian, actor, writer, 61; Nathanael Frazee, actress, 32; Janet Timney, textile designer, 49; Derek Twigg, Labour MP, 39; Michael Williams, actor, 63; Richard Wilson, actor, and director, 62.

A Country Diary

STANLEY INCLINE: Disused rural railway lines all over County Durham have been converted into public walkways, but this one is a little different. No smoke-belching locomotives ever chuffed along here. Instead a stationary engine at the top of Billy Row bank tugged coal trucks up from the old colliery at Waterhouses and then let gravity take them on the return journey. When deep mining finished some of this land was mined for opencast coal, but now agriculture has returned and the landscape is beginning to recover. Former opencast land is easy to spot — straight field boundaries and smooth contours carpeted in uniformly lush, high yielding forage grasses. Old

established pastures, irregularly tucked in between woodlands and streams, are full of buttercups and hawkweeds. The railway embankment must have been a refuge for wild flowers when surrounding land became a moonscape of opencast mining, and it hasn't taken long for some of them to reinvade old haunts. A drift of ragged robin flowers and dense clusters of deep purple northern marsh orchids have already made themselves at home among ash saplings in the corner of one of the new pastures. But it's wild grasses that have benefited most from the protection of the embankment. Ummown and ungrazed, the trackside is home to a glorious mixture of bents, bromes,

twitches, timothy, melick, meadow grasses, foxgloves, red clover, false oat, cock's foot, crested dog's tail and Yorkshire dog, flowering as profusely as they would have in the earlier years of the century, when the coal trucks rolled past.

PHIL GATES

Death Notices

CHENEZES, Elizabeth Hilda, aged 82, passed away peacefully at Trinity Hospital, Clifton, on July 7, 1998, after a long illness. She was the wife of the late Mr. Chenezes. Buried at Clifton Cemetery. Family flowers accepted. Mrs. Chenezes, 100, Marlborough Road, Walsworth, CV35 9EP. Tel. 01827 274 788.

WTO place your announcement telephone 0171 735 4567 or fax 0171 735 4707 between 9am and 5pm Mon-Fri.

Analysis Oil

The boys from the black stuff

The re-entry of Iran and Iraq to the world's crude markets could precipitate a repeat of the Thirties crash. **Alex Brummer** and **Ian Black** spell out the possibilities

OIL price plunge confounds Malaysia; "Opec to meet in crisis mode as oil prices keep dropping"; "Saudi Arabia signals new alliance of oil exporter to underpin sagging world crude prices". And so the headlines have run during the past few weeks. Oil prices are in a downward spiral, threatening the political stability of producing countries and arousing fears that we may be in for a period of deflation, similar to the 1930s.

Behind the fall — prices have tumbled 40 per cent since October last year — there are three factors: a sharp cutback in demand as a result of the crisis in the Asia-Pacific region; over-supply of oil in part because of bad decisions by the Organisation of the Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (Opec); technological changes which have dramatically reduced the cost of exploring and extracting oil.

There is a further geo-political factor which could be as important as supply and demand in determining whether the fall will provoke a global crisis: the position of rogue producers prevented by sanctions from engaging in full production. Iraq's production is still greatly restricted by United Nations sanctions, which restrict its official output to amounts required to meet humanitarian needs. Meanwhile Iran, which attended a big oil conference in London in June, has made it clear that it is determined to put American sanctions against it to one side and once again become a major player in the world markets. The return of either Iran and Iraq, or both, as major exporters could dramatically redefine supply conditions and add to

regional tensions in the Middle East.

Forecasters of oil market conditions expect global demand to slacken sharply this year with a growth rate of 1.5 per cent, which would amount to additional consumption of 1.2 million barrels a day. This compares with the growth rate of 2.5 per cent or 2.1 million barrels a day last year. The main reason for this slowdown — which could get worse if the Asia-Pacific region does not pull out of its slide — is collapse in demand in the countries of East Asia. The Pacific region, including Japan, China and India, consumed 20 million barrels a day in 1997 or 28 per cent of global demand for energy in recent years. The region's growth has been in the order of 5 per cent, soaking up an extra 1 million barrels of oil a day.

If in 1998 the region's growth is flat or even negative — which seems possible given the serious deterioration of conditions in Japan — then the growth in demand for oil (half of which comes from Asia-Pacific annually) could be seriously curtailed.

ESTIMATES prepared by the investment bankers Merrill Lynch suggest that total worldwide demand in 1998 will be 75 million barrels a day, a figure very much in line with those put out by the International Energy Agency (IEA). Both forecasts could prove to be too optimistic should the downturn in the Asia-Pacific region deepen.

Normal market response to a sharp cut in demand for oil is to ease back on production to protect the commodity's market price and producers' profit margins. But these rules do not operate in an oil market where geo-politics also weigh heavily. It was just such political factors and the need to collect greater revenues to

support domestic economies which led Opec to raise its production ceiling in November last year, just as the Asian crisis was worsening. It was a fatal error. Huge inventories of oil began to build up at refineries, forcing the oil price down to \$15 a barrel. Circumstances were not helped when Iraq unexpectedly entered the fray and temporarily pumped up its production. Since then Opec has been engaged in a desperate rearguard action aimed at stemming production among its members, although it has no firm control over non-Opec countries such as Mexico.

THE first production cutback came in March 1998, as the Asian economies slumped. Opec members decided to reduce output by 1.5 million barrels a day of which 1.2 million would be found by the Opec producers and the rest by those outside. This failed to work because of rogue supplies from Iraq.

So in June, Opec producers, their economies crippled by low oil prices, announced sharper-than-expected output cuts of up to 5 per cent to drain a disastrous glut of crude. On June 24 the group agreed to choke supply by a further 1.35 million barrels per day.

In the Middle East, home of the bulk of the world's proven oil reserves, this sustained fall in prices has taken a heavy toll on Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia. In response to falling revenues from oil the Saudis ought to have diversified their economy and cut the size of their state, they haven't.

It is two other regional producers, Iran and Iraq, which underline the intimate links between the economics of the global oil industry and wider political changes, and the difficulties faced by businessmen and policy-makers in disen-

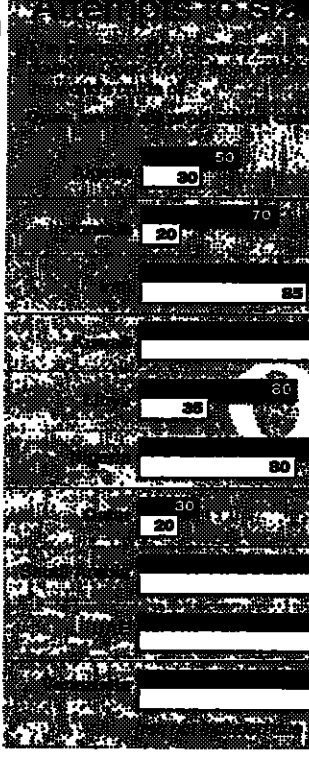
tangling the two. Iran, hemmed in by American hostility since Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 revolution, is being driven by a dire need for hard cash to revitalise its flagging energy sector — still accounting for 85 per cent of its hard currency earnings. The investment and stability that the cash brings are vital if the reformist drive started by President Mohamed Khatami is to prosper.

June's Opec agreement, intriguingly, is thought to have been made possible by talks between Saudi Arabia's King Fahd and the Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi — an unthinkable axis only a year ago and a telling indication of the rapidly changing political map of the region.

Last week, at a London business conference, Iranian officials unveiled \$5.7bn worth of energy projects. This illustrates how market forces are shunting aside deep-rooted sensitivities about foreign control of strategic economic assets.

Even before its World Cup victory Iran was trumpeting President Bill Clinton's failure to "contain" it. Unilateral American laws still prevent United States companies from investing in Iranian oil and gas, but strong European Union opposition, in which the normally Atlanticist Britain played a key and combative role, roundly defeated Washington's attempt to force others to follow suit.

BATTLE was joined in earnest when the American firm Conoco was banned from Iran a \$2 billion deal to develop Iran's huge South Pars gas field that was eventually taken on by the French company Total. Geopolitical changes elsewhere have enhanced Iran's importance as a bridge between the



Caspian and landlocked Central Asian countries and the Gulf. Oil companies are showing little patience with American attempts to make them fight this proxy war.

Across the Gulf, Iraq, with the world's second-largest oil reserves, presents an even more complicated picture as the world waits for an end to the seven-year UN embargo.

Exactly when that will come remains a mystery, but it would take only a determined decision by Saddam Hussein to concede the "full, final and complete disclosure" the UN demands to end the embargo. Iraq has scrapped the deadly nuclear, chemical and biological weapons he acquired before invading Kuwait. Washington may have its own agenda, but it would be very isolated indeed if it

insisted that the sanctions must stay in place after that.

Despite the embargo, Iraq is already an actor in world oil markets. Smuggling via Turkey and Iran helps bring in desperately-needed hard currency and the UN allows Iraq to sell \$5.25 billion of crude every six months to buy food, medicine and other humanitarian goods. So far Baghdad insists it can only handle exports of \$4 billion as its oil industry has fallen into disrepair. But projects worth \$20 billion are expected to be up for grabs once the embargo goes. Oil companies await that moment eagerly.

And Iraq's embargo may well be the last the world will see. Oil sanctions are increasingly discredited.

afford to drill, without the vast expenditure which used to be involved in sinking trial wells. The diminishing costs of production are coming at a time when demand is falling. Such over-supply surely suggests we are about to witness a new era of low fossil energy costs which should be good for the global economy. After all it was the high oil prices shocks of 1973 after the Yom Kippur war and 1979 after the Iranian revolution which are generally blamed for two of the worst post-war recessions. But falling energy prices are also a serious problem for the producers. The Middle-East countries are hurting badly and are having to curtail their domestic budgets, while in the Yemen tighter economic conditions are fomenting unrest. In Russia oil exports are a vital component of the recovery plan and throughout Latin America lower oil prices are causing difficulty.

A NUMBER of new drilling processes are changing forever the costs of oil exploration. These include three-dimensional seismic techniques — which allow exploration companies to pinpoint deposits more accurately — and horizontal drilling which allows companies to recover greater volumes of oil from existing wells. Some estimates suggest that these new methods of exploration and extraction have already shaved some two dollars a barrel off costs, which means a permanent reduction in the market price for oil irrespective of broader trends in the marketplace. It also encourages new production companies into the marketplace because they can now

afford to drill, without the vast expenditure which used to be involved in sinking trial wells.

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Falling commodity prices were a precursor of the great crash some 50 years ago. As producing countries cut back demand the recessionary forces already on the loose in Asia and elsewhere are exacerbated. In the short run cheap oil may be good for consumers buying petrol at the pumps and big users such as the airlines. But the complex politics of oil mean that oil costs are a destabilising variable in the global economic and political mix.

Sources: (1) Oil Industry: A Test of Character, Merrill Lynch report, June 22 1998. Graphics Sources: US Department of Energy; Merrill Lynch; Oil World; <http://www.oilworld.com>; BP <http://www.bp.com/bpstats/pages/oil.htm> Researcher: Matthew Keating. Alex Brummer is the Guardian's financial editor; Ian Black is diplomatic editor.

Liddle's magic circle 10



March 5 UN's oil embargo is relaxed. Iraq increases production by more than 50%. March output is over 1.8 million barrels a day compared with 1.2 million in 1997.

March 22 Meeting in Riyadh. Oil ministers of Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Kuwait and Mexico announce cuts in world production by 2 million barrels a day.

March 30 Opec cuts production on a combined cutback of 1.25 million barrels a day in oil production, starting April 1. The cutback is temporary.

June 4 and 24 Emergency talks in Amsterdam. Opec members agree to cut production by 1.5 million barrels a day.

January, 1998 Threat of a second Gulf War over UN arms inspections in Iraq. Before the first Gulf War started, fears of disruption to world supplies had pushed crude prices above \$32 a barrel.

November, 1997 Opec raises production ceiling from 22 million barrels a day to 27 million (10%).

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Insurers may sue over Serps

£2bn age rebate delay for millions

Liz Stuart

INSURANCE companies may sue the Government following the late payment of £2 billion in rebates to personal pension plan schemes.

The delays are due to glitches in the £171 million project to update the Contributions Agency's computer system in advance of its merger with the Inland Revenue.

The job, one of the largest information technology projects ever undertaken in Europe, involves transferring National Insurance details of 64 million people. The original go-live date for the new system was in April.

Now insurers are seeking compensation of hundreds of thousands of pounds for the hold up in payments of the age-related rebates for the 5.6 million people contracted out of the State Earnings Related Pension, or Serps, into a personal pension.

The delays will result in a gargantuan administration bill for the pension providers, who will have to ensure that customers do not lose out financially because of the late allocation.

Age-related rebates, introduced in last year's reform of the pensions act in an attempt to make personal pensions more attractive, are normally paid in June, July and August — the average is £700 per person.

Notebook

Many investors on wrong track



Edited by
Lisa Buckingham

IT'S OFFICIAL. We are wasting millions of pounds a year trying to secure a better-than-average return for our old age.

and bonuses, they are not subject to the bizarre investment strategies of one or two driven executives and, most importantly, we could save ourselves a heck of a lot of money.

Counter argument

SO SHOPPERS are spending. Yesterday's sales figures from Dixons — 10 per cent down, but only by comparison with last year's windfall boom conditions — cast a new light on the state of the high street.

Recent gloomy news from the likes of MFI has led to exaggerated fears about consumers keeping their hands in their pockets and their money in the bank. But the official retail sales figures have shown that people are still spending and this is confirmed by Dixons' experience.

It is, however, a tricky summer to judge — a fact to which the minutes of yesterday's monetary policy committee meeting will attest.

First, there was last year's windfall boomlet, which provides exaggerated comparative figures. Second, the dull weather has played havoc with fashion sales. Third, the Asian crisis has led to bargains which will depress sales values if not volumes.

Finally, there is the confusion of the World Cup. It may have led to less spending because soccer fans are too busy watching TV. Or perhaps not if disgruntled non-soccer-watchers have hit the shops.

Late arrival

AFTER more than two years of deliberation, Karel Van Miert should have done better. Instead, British Airways, its putative partner American Airlines and their hundreds of thousands of regulation-blighted employees are left another half-way house.

At issue is the number of slots the partners would have at the world's most important gateway — Heathrow. Eighteen months ago, the Office of Fair Trading recommended that 168 slots should be given up. It has taken Mr Van Miert more than 300 working days to conclude that should be 267 slots. BA and AA disagree and will challenge the ruling.

The putative partnership of Lufthansa, SAS and United Airlines is also furious at the number of slots Mr Van Miert says it should give up. At least these airlines have had to wait less time to invoke their wrath.

The BA/AA merger looks increasingly like a doomed chimera. Few outside the airlines' boardroom have felt compelled by the arguments. The boards of both companies should impose a deadline. If they cannot meet that, they should give up.

Air war intensifies



Unhappy landing... An American Airlines flight arriving at Heathrow taxis past the British Airways' maintenance hangar

PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID DYSON

EC applies reverse thrust to airline alliance

Approval terms leave BA and its rivals angry, say Keith Harper and Julie Wolf in Brussels

PROSPECTS for the hotly contested alliance between British Airways and American Airlines looked remote last night after Brussels gave only conditional approval and rival airlines reacted to that decision with predictable fury.

The terms, while harsher than the two airlines wanted, are considerably less stringent than those first outlined by competition commissioner Karel van Miert more than a year ago. Nonetheless, full regulatory approval from European and US authorities is likely to take months.

Trade and Industry Secretary Margaret Beckett said the Government's approval was subject to several conditions which would protect competition rules. Privately, ministers are pessimistic about a deal being reached before next year at the earliest and are still working out a timetable.

While Bob Ayling, BA's chief executive, welcomed the EC announcement, he described the terms as "too harsh". He was particularly critical that BA was being asked to give up 267 slots in London and said that number was too high.

The commission will make its final ruling in October or November after listening to comments from the airlines, their competitors and European governments.

Under the conditions announced yesterday, BA and AA would have to give up a maximum of 267 weekly take-off and landing slots at Heathrow and Gatwick, with 220-230 slots coming from the former. This represents about 19 daily return flights.

Mr Van Miert said: "Slots have to be made available on demand of competitors." A commission official said that, if the EU issued its final ruling in November, the slots would have to be released in time for the next season, beginning in April. Another official estimated that it could take six months to a year for the 267 slots to become free.

It emerged yesterday that the trade in slots at Heathrow is still being fiercely contested. BA did not deny a report in Flight International magazine that it had paid more than £25 million each to Air UK for 56 slots for four daily return journeys between Gatwick and Heathrow. The item appears in the accounts of KLM, of which Air UK is a subsidiary.

The EU's ruling says that BA and AA must reduce frequencies between London and Chicago, Dallas and Miami, all considered "hub" airports. However, the airlines will have to cut their flights for six months and only if competitors are interested in the routes.

Mr Van Miert denied that the decision marked a climbdown from his original call for about 350 slots to be relinquished. He said his initial figure was based on information which turned out to be incorrect. Moreover, "we listened to the views of companies".

Nonetheless, Mr Van Miert said he expected criticism from airlines. "For some it will go too far, for others not enough," he said.

The commissioner also warned Britain not to conclude an open-skies deal with the US that shut out European carriers out of Heathrow.

The commission gave its preliminary views, too, on a Lufthansa-United alliance, saying that the airlines would have to shed 103 weekly slots at Frankfurt and Copenhagen.

BA/AA dominance

BA/AA 100 per cent of flights

London - Baltimore

London - Chicago

London - Dallas/Fort Worth

London - Philadelphia

London - Pittsburgh

London - Tampa

London - Washington

50 per cent of flights

London - New York

75 per cent of flights

London - Los Angeles

70 per cent of flights

London - San Francisco

100,000 jobs 'at risk'

David Gow
Industrial Editor

BRITAIN'S engineering industry yesterday warned the Bank of England that the strong pound and high interest rates would force the economy into a hard landing, with manufacturing heading for a deep recession and the loss of more than 100,000 jobs in the next 18 months.

The Engineering Employers' Federation's latest quarterly trends survey, released yesterday to coincide with the meeting of the Bank's monetary policy committee, showed a sudden and marked deterioration in the industry's prospects over the past three months.

Its publication followed an unprecedented lobbying by the industry of MFC members and government ministers in an effort to force a change in monetary policy. "Even if rates stay still things will get worse," said Graham Mackenzie, EEF director-general.

The EEF wants the cabinet and Bank to signal that rates should have peaked at their current level of 7.5 per cent and that Britain will join the single currency sooner rather than later.

"The combination of an overvalued pound, borrowing costs far higher than those of our major competitors and a slowing domestic economy are taking a heavy toll," Mr Mackenzie said.

"Further damage would result from any measure that helped to sustain the level of the pound or increased financing costs for already hard-pressed businesses."

With domestic orders declining for the first time in the current economic cycle and 12,000 engineering jobs lost in the first quarter alone, the EEF expects the scale of redundancies to deepen and is poised to revise sharply upwards its earlier estimate that 100,000 jobs could be lost between April and the end of next year. Export orders fell for the sixth quarter in a row, according to the survey of 1,511 firms.

At the electrical, computer and mobile phone stores, sales are 10 per cent below last year. But 1997 sales were boosted by windfall gains from building society flotations, so the current figures are well ahead of the 1996 level and higher than had been expected in the present economic climate.

Sir Stanley Kalms, Dixons' chairman, said: "We're all a bit nervous and I couldn't say you could ignore the Far East."

But at the moment in the UK there are still plenty of big-ticket items being sold. Sir Stanley reported profits of £218 million, up 9 per cent on last year. Sales grew by 13 per cent to £2.7 billion but most of that increase came from new stores. Because of falling computer prices, comparable sales at PC World were 3 per cent lower than in 1997.

Sir Stanley said new technology would continue to drive sales and profits, and promised to continue expanding the Dixons, Currys, PC World and Link formats. "There's still plenty of space to grow," he said.

Euro-bank to curb lending

Larry Elliott

THE European Central Bank is to impose a German-style system of curbs on the lending potential of commercial banks inside the single-currency zone in an attempt to ensure stability in money market rates after monetary union.

Wim Duisenberg, ECB president, said banks would have to lodge between 1.5 per cent and 2.5 per cent of their liability base at the national central banks in their home country every month.

Although the ECB denied that the decision to adopt a minimum reserves target represented a capitulation to pressure from the Bundesbank, the move was widely seen as a way of exerting tight control over bank lending.

Mr Duisenberg said the system for the 11 countries joining monetary union in the first week of January would contribute to the stability of money market rates.

Britain and the US have a much lighter regime, with the Bank of England insisting on 0.15 per cent cash rate deposits from banks in the City. Eddie George, the Bank's Governor, said yesterday that the issue about using a minimum reserve system had been the extent to which it would be a tax on the banking system and the scope it had for distorting competition between financial service providers, both within countries moving to the euro and between that region and the rest of the world.

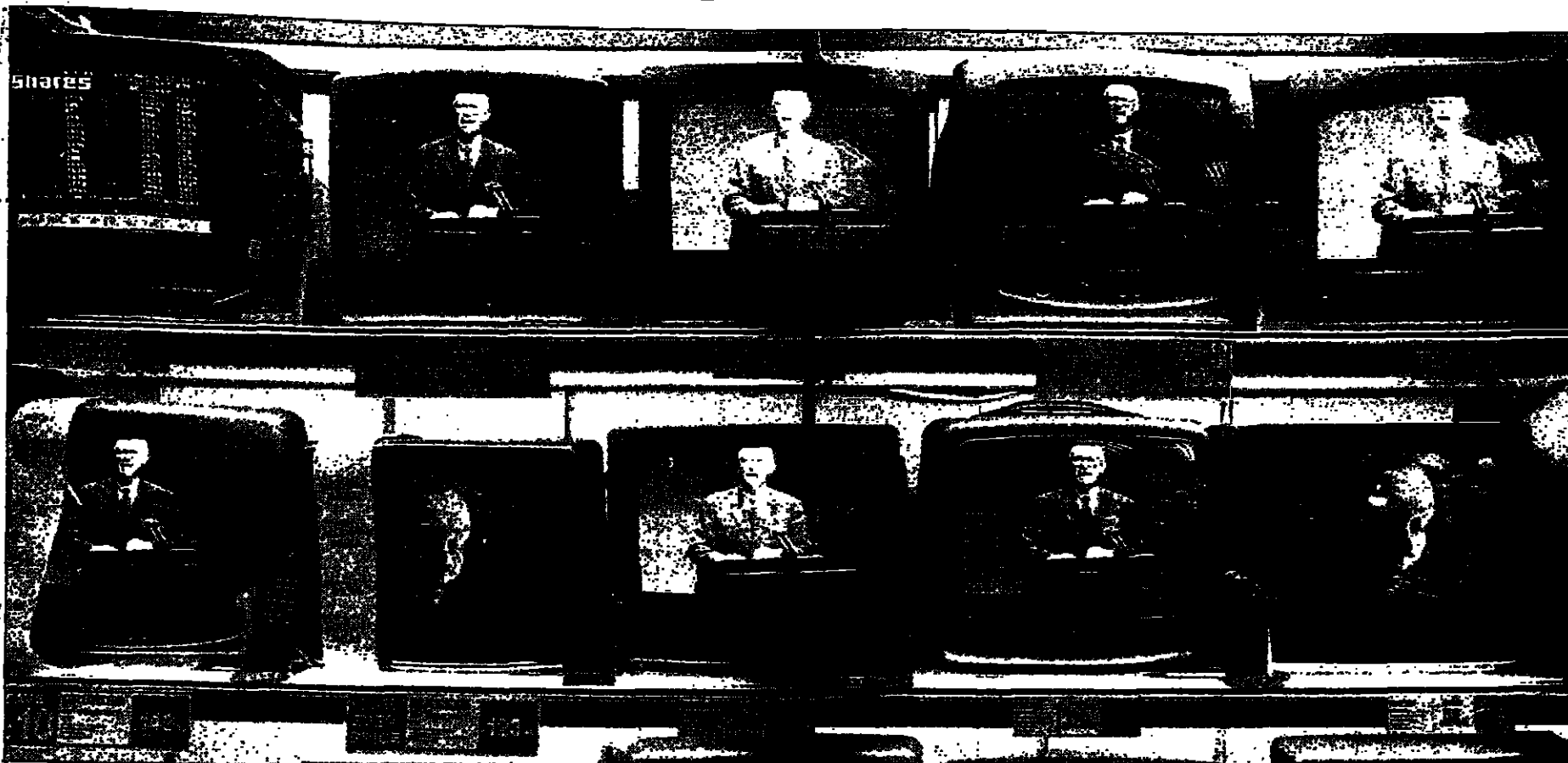
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Austria 20.35	Greece 462.86	Mexico 0.81	South Africa 8.701
Belgium 29.53	Hong Kong 12.32	Netherlands 3.244	Spain 243.59
Canada 2.338	India 69.95	New Zealand 3.06	Sweden 12.94
Cyprus 0.849	Ireland 1.38	Norway 12.30	Switzerland 2.23
Denmark 11.08	Israel 6.01	Portugal 294.12	Turkey 423.650
Finland 8.278	Italy 2.658	Saudi Arabia 4.03	USA 1.501
France 8.675			

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مكتبة الصالح

Take the BBC director-general plus a handpicked audience of 250 and what have you got? An Audience with John Birt



BBC director-general Sir John Birt will attempt to put the corporation's various activities into focus at next week's meeting

PHOTOGRAPH: MARTIN GODWIN

Knight-time television

Simon Beavis
Media Business Editor

THE BBC's efforts to silence its critics and prove that it is open and transparent will be taken a step further next week when the corporation stages what it describes as its first "annual general meeting".

The move — unprecedented for a public sector organisation — is part of a growing effort by executives to present the corporation's financial and business affairs along the lines of a public limited company.

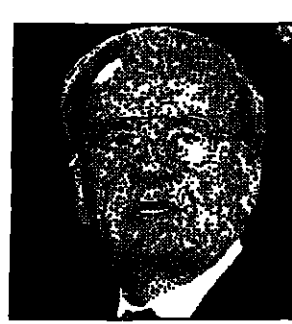
The meeting will coincide with the publication of the annual accounts, which will disclose far more information about the BBC's commercial activities than ever before, and will include a statement that the corporation is adopting private sector standards on corporate governance.

Insiders acknowledge that the meeting — to be staged next Wednesday in the Radio Theatre at Broadcasting House — will be a relatively modest affair. It will be open to an invited audience only. Some 250 people drawn from consumer groups, lobby organisations, "opinion

What the critics say



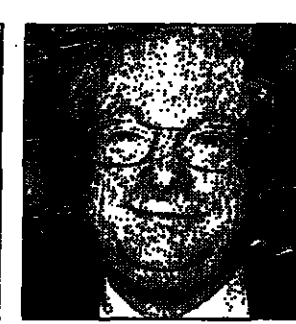
On the licence fee
"It makes no sense at all. In an age when hundreds of channels are available — 97 per cent of the population pay a compulsory tax to watch just two!"
The Sun, owned by Rupert Murdoch



On public service
"We are about change and progress, not about protectionism through legislation and cronyism. We are about vigorous competition, not about winging or distorting the market. We are about daring and doing for ourselves, not about riding on someone else's coat tails."
Rupert Murdoch, who owns 40 per cent of BSkyB



On BBC accountability
"The BBC is a defensive monolith not an open public body."
David Elstein, chief executive of Channel 5



On the corporation's structure
"There is the issue of the licence itself, due for review in 2002. I believe it would be appropriate at that stage not just to review the question of the licence fee but to look more broadly at the overall governance of the BBC and to do it properly."
Chris Smith, Culture Secretary

party — even though it has no shareholders. The report and accounts, to be published at the same time, have been overhauled with the help of accountants KPMG so that for the first time it will be clear what the BBC earns from its commercial activities and how much they contribute to licence fee-funded operations.

Details of a £1 billion investment in digital television and radio over the next five years will also be detailed in the accounts.

Since BBC directors do not work for a quoted company, however, Sir John and his colleagues will not be treated to the usual barrage of shareholder complaints about share options — they have none.

Pay will be an issue — not least because Sir John's salary, benefits and bonuses rose by over 9 per cent last year to £287,000 — a highly competitive public sector salary, if measured by the standards of private companies and other broadcasters.

The basic pay of all other members of the executive committee rose by an average of 7.5 per cent in the year to March 31, when average pay for the rest of the corporation's 22,500 staff rose by under 4 per cent.

* Website at: www.bbc.co.uk/info/report98

MPs renew attack on services homes sale

Julia Finch

THE Conservative government's sale of more than 57,000 armed-services homes to a company controlled by Japanese bank Nomura has been officially condemned for the third time in 18 months.

The Commons Public Accounts Committee said the £1.6 billion deal, engineered by former Defence Secretary Michael Portillo, had short-changed taxpayers. The MPs calculated that more than £20 million a year of public money is maintaining and paying rent for empty homes.

The criticisms follow similar conclusions from the Commons Defence Committee and the National Audit Office.

The service homes were sold to Annington Homes, which is 75 per cent owned by Nomura, for an average of £30,000. The homes include 500 "high value" service

houses and 16 official residences for senior officers.

The Ministry of Defence now rents back the properties — including empty ones — from Nomura for £100 million a year. It has to release several hundred each year for Nomura to sell on to housing associations or private buyers.

The MoD is responsible for maintenance costs of the entire property portfolio.

The Public Accounts Committee said the homes were sold for up to £140 million less than their potential worth — at the former MoD site at Basingstoke in Hertfordshire, for instance, two-bedroom homes are on the market for £82,000 — and that Annington should have taken on the maintenance costs because the MoD was now upgrading homes for the benefit of a private company.

The MPs added that it was disturbing that more than 15,600 of the services homes are standing empty.

Underside

Dan Atkinson

THE Tote is not the only gaming interest of Guy Hands, the 240 million-a-year head of Nomura's principal finance group (owner of William Hill). His wife does the National Lottery each week, despite Mr Hands's view that the returns are pitiful and that she ought to give to charity instead. Mrs H has her special numbers and is convinced it could be her.

PS: It already is.

OUTSPOKEN Nottingham South Labour MP Alan Simpson recently received a delegation of tobacco workers from the Players plant in his constituency. Their jobs, they said, were at risk from baccy smuggling into Britain unless UK taxes were lowered. The member was sympathetic but curious as to why the Players people objected to the cross-frontier racket. Had

they not been on two shifts and now were being offered three? The Players agreed. Was this not because the Nottinghamshire baccy was exported to Belgium and thence smuggled into Britain? Ah! The Players retired for a rethink.

HALF the world, it is said, has never made a telephone call, and our man in East Africa can believe it. Next time you are asked the number of your nearest fax, he says, spare a thought for Bhaskar Mandanna. He runs a tea estate in the remote hills of Tanzania and his nearest telephone is a four-hour drive away, a journey he makes once every 10 days. And don't ring to ask whether the fax has arrived. The telephone hasn't worked for 10 years.

BACK home, Daiwa Europe is rumoured to be in line for the "ongoing review" into its future. An £800 million deal gone sour is not believed to have done much for its life expectancy. One insider displayed

typical Japanese stoicism when quizzed by our agent. On the record? There's a review. And off the record? "I hope I speak to you in my next job."

BACK to the tobacco business, where PR man Michael Friedman goes in to bat for BAT. But while hubby faces the smokers of the ban-everything lobby, wife Sue supervises the launch of Magostic North, her third novel (Little Brown;



£14.99). Mrs P opens the action in 1917 and traces a European family during the turbulent 20th century. A cursory examination discloses far too few smokers in this tale, although the characters' nerves could clearly do with calming: "Charlotte found herself wishing for a narcotic, a soothing opiate." Why didn't she say? A carton of 555s is on its way.

FROM the Government's information wire yesterday, dispatches from the front line of our world-beating economy: "The UK horse industry is a vital part of rural economy and its interests must be protected and developed. Farming Industry Minister Lord Donoghue said today: "The United Kingdom is to develop a more accurate and longer-range rocket for the Army's Multiple Launch Rocket System". Self-employed ballers must charge VAT and "Laws protecting trees and woodlands will be strengthened". So, buy horse-drawn rocket launchers, sell ballers working for timber companies.

Catholic fears as Mirror buys Derry paper

Chris Barrie, Media Business Correspondent

ONE of the media world's best known Ulstermen took control of a leading nationalist paper yesterday, provoking fears that the Roman Catholic community may lose one of its staunchest voices.

The Mirror Group bought the Derry Journal for £18.25 million. It is one of Ireland's oldest and best established newspapers, selling in Derry and across the border in rural Donegal.

The sale of the paper and its sister publications to the Mirror Group, whose chief executive is Ulsterman David Montgomery, brought immediate suggestions from staff that there would be job cuts and loss of editorial independence.

One reporter, who did not wish to be named, said the staff were disgusted at the sale. Mr Montgomery was "very much a Unionist", and although guarantees of independence had been given, there was a danger the paper could be forced to become middle of the road.

"He won't put David Trimble on the front overnight but it will be like Gerry Adams taking over the News Letter [a Loyalist paper also owned by the Mirror Group]. The

temptation will become too much."

A local priest, who also did not wish to be named, said the Derry Journal had "never acknowledged the partition", selling across the border, and taking a pro-Catholic stance on church matters. The paper had a very high profile in the community which was largely nationalist. However, he added that it might be good for the community as a whole if Irish newspapers were to become less sectarian.

Mr Montgomery sought to allay the fears by promising to respect the paper's "traditions and editorial ethos". The Journal had served the people of Derry very well.

Pat McArd, group editor of the Journal and its sister titles, admitted there was concern among the group's 120-strong staff about their future. He noted that the Mirror Group had said there would be no immediate redundancies.

The Derry Journal was founded in 1772 and is the city's largest selling weekly newspaper. The company also owns the Donegal Democrat and the Donegal People's Press.

One observer suggested the Mirror Group may be keen to use the paper's Derry Journal's printing press to produce its other papers in Ireland.

Tax pledge fails to boost yen

Jonathan Watts in Tokyo

A VAGUE promise by Japan's Prime Minister of tax cuts to revitalize the economy disappointed the markets yesterday.

Earlier in the day, the Nikkei index of the Tokyo Stock Exchange had risen 114 points, or 0.7 per cent, on expectations of a clear commitment to a permanent cut.

But after Ryutaro Hashimoto's speech, which gave no details of the size of the tax cuts or of how they would be funded, the yen was unchanged against the dollar.

Mr Hashimoto said the plan would be drawn up after Sunday's election for Japan's upper house and implemented next year.

Investors and international policy makers have been calling for such a move to pull Japan out of recession and boost the export industries of other Asian nations.

Mr Hashimoto's comments followed a week in which he

hinted at tax cuts one day only to backpedal furiously the next. This has frustrated the markets and damaged the credibility of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party.

According to the latest opinion polls, the LDP is in danger of losing the 61 seats it has up for re-election in the 262-seat upper chamber. Mr Hashimoto could then face strong pressure to resign.

Recent reports said the LDP was considering a permanent 2 trillion yen (£8.8 billion) tax cut. This would involve lowering the maximum rate, which, including residential taxes, stands at 60 per cent, 20 percentage points higher than Britain.

Earlier this week, Koichi Kato, secretary general of the LDP, said tax cuts were likely to be in the region of only 200 billion yen.

The party has vacillated because of the contentious issue of how the cuts would be funded. Increasing the minimum income threshold would risk an electoral backlash.

News in brief

Judge clears way for RAC sale

A HIGH COURT judge yesterday dismissed legal challenges to the Royal Automobile Club's £450m sale and cleared the way for £35,000 cheques to be sent to each of the RAC's 12,000 full members in September after Office of Fair Trading Approval. The court rejected challenges to the sale to US firm Candiant from overseas members, retired members and others claiming a share of the spoils. — Julia Finch

EC approves £46bn MCI deal

THE European Commission approved the £46 billion (£28 billion) purchase of telecoms company MCI by WorldCom on condition that MCI sell its Internet business. The deal, which has yet to be cleared by US authorities, will create a huge telecoms group with revenues of \$32 billion. Cable and Wireless is negotiating to buy MCI's Internet operations. — Chris Barrie

Capital can rock on

CAPITAL Radio, which has offered £16 million for the alternative rock music station XFM, will be told by the Radio Authority today that it can run another FM station in London providing it refrains from cross-selling of advertising and maintains a separate news service. The authority will also say Capital must not water down XFM's remit to broadcast alternative music. The XFM victory provides solace for Capital after Chris Evans's Ginger Media Group pipped it to buy Virgin Radio. — Simon Beavis

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Chris Hawkins

Bertolini produced a turn of foot to win the July Stakes in

Lovers Knot, running in the red and white colours of the Cheveley Park Stud which also had the third Flawless



PHOTOGRAPH: JULIAN HERBERT

It is surely premature to discard him, however, and today's contest over six furlongs gives him a big chance to re-establish his reputation. His latest effort when beaten by Bolshoi in the

Elmadim now meets Bolshoi at levels and over his favoured trip must be fancied to turn the tables on this rival as well as Bollin Joanne who

He was impressive that day

(3.05) I make him the selection.
The Bunbury Cup is wide open but **Harmonic Way** (3.40) should give backers a run for their money.

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Paul Rees

cussions have been taking place with the WRU as well as with individuals who have shown an interest in helping the club."

Pontypridd, who hope to

brought in the winger Michael Wood, 21, from West Hartlepool, the prop Ian Peel, 22, from Wharfedale, and the full-back Peter Massey, 23, from Moseley.

5 (3) 1-42337 Ellen Mapple (7) (88) and C Dwyer 3-9-8
6 (12) 312000 Redumb (8) Miss B Sanders 5-9-2
7 (10) 3-801 Sordal (8) Miss B Sanders 5-9-2

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1. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1997; 277: 1033-1037.

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Cricket

NatWest Trophy
Warwickshire v Kent

Lordly Lara counts out brittle Kent

Paul Weaver at Edgbaston sees a timely return to form by Warwickshire's captain

THAT frisson of anticipation that once attended Brian Lara's walk to the wicket is no longer there. When his bat swings there is still some sense of danger, as there is when trees are bent by a sudden wind, but these days the storm rarely comes.

Waiting for another Lara miracle was beginning to feel like hanging around for a comet. Yesterday, however, he batted as gloriously as he did in his *annus mirabilis* of 1994. This was the first time this summer that he had shown such form and his innings of 133 put Warwickshire on course for victory over Kent by the small matter of 167 runs.

The entire Kent side mustered only three runs more than Lara. This was their heaviest drubbing in the competition and their sixth consecutive NatWest defeat by Warwickshire.

Some at Edgbaston were beginning to wonder whether Lara was still capable of such an innings. In the calendar year of 1994 he scored 14 centuries in first-class cricket; since then the West Indies captain has managed only nine. He started his Warwickshire career four years ago with championship scores of 147, 106, 120 not out and 188, with that 501 soon to follow.

This season he has yet to reach three figures, and there have been only two half-centuries, and an average of 22. But this was his second hundred in the one-day game, the other

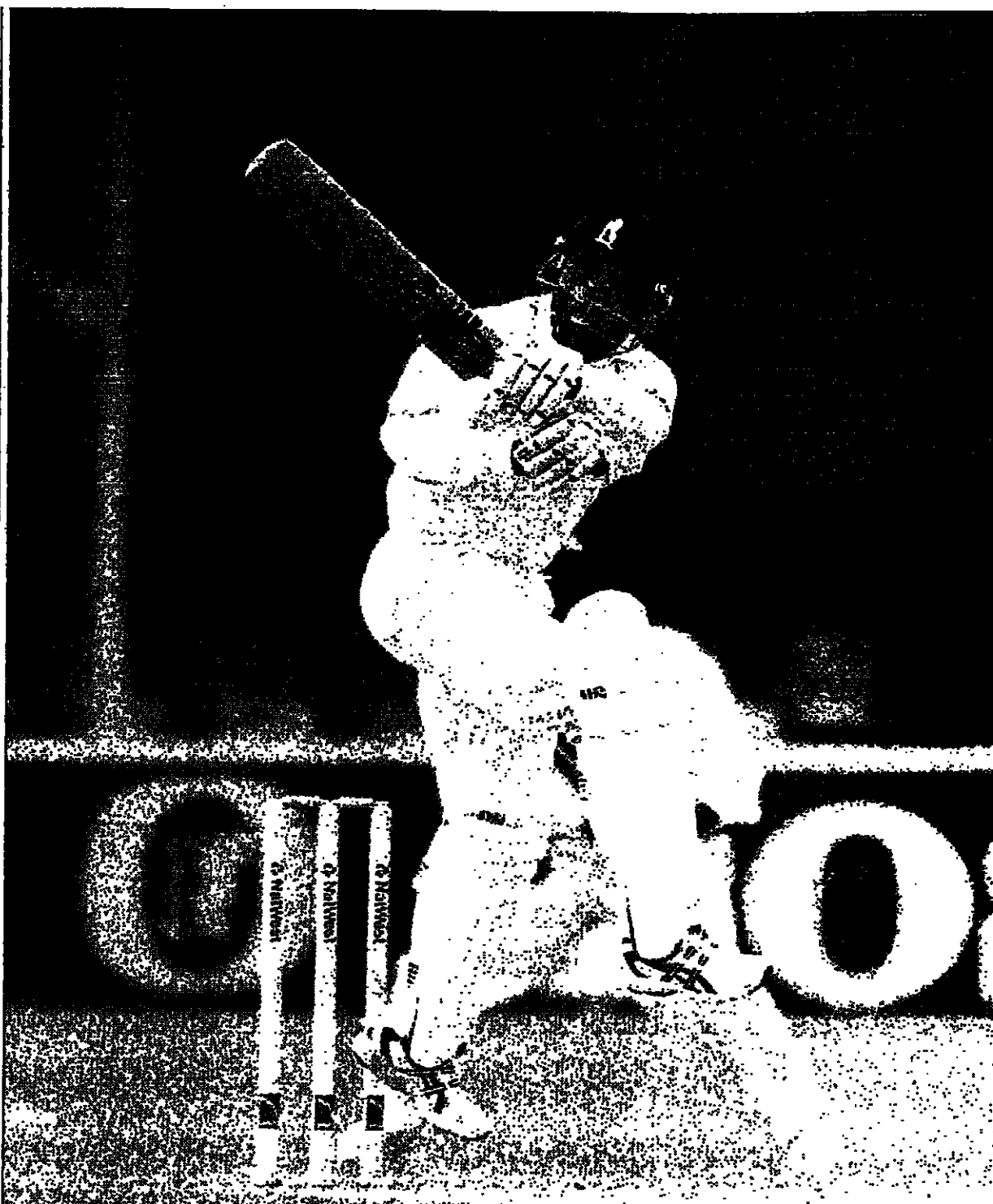
was in a B&H Cup group game, and four years ago his best in this cricket was 81.

Yesterday the ball swung all day and there was uneven bounce, too. He came in at eight for one in the third over and left at 240 for four in the 51st. He might have been bowled first ball and was fortunate to survive a leg-before shout by Martin McCague when he had made only one. He faced 158 balls and there were 18 fours and a six, driven over long-on off Ben Phillips.

He moved from 85 to 97 with three successive fours off McCague, a straight pull-drive, an on-drive and a hook. With David Hemp (59) he put on a county record 169 for the third wicket in 34 overs. A final, 50-ball 46 not out from Trevor Penney lifted the Warwickshire total to 303 for six.

Kent, who had won the toss, never looked like getting there. David Fulton and Trevor Ward were soon caught in the slips and everything depended on Carl Hooper. But after making 38 he became the third of Graeme Welch's four wickets, leg-before to one that may have gone down the leg side. Kent were out for 136 in 42.1 overs.

The decision to appoint Lara as the Warwickshire captain was a daft one but if they can win this trophy, the only pot they failed to lift in 1994, it will part-compensate for a disappointing championship. "We were unlucky not to qualify in the Benson and Hedges after winning four out of five groups matches, so we're determined to win this," Lara said.



Back in the swing... Brian Lara on his way to a very welcome century against Kent at Edgbaston yesterday

Cardigan keeps Hampshire cosy

CARDIGAN Connor helped button up Hampshire's three-wicket victory over Essex at Southampton in a remarkable first over.

After only five balls of the match Essex were two for three and the cream of their batting — Paul Prichard, Nasser Hussain and Stuart Law — had all fallen to the veteran West Indian seamer.

Ambushed on a damp, seaming pitch, Essex only reached 129 all out thanks

to a mature and determined 47 from their last man out Danny Law. Law had come in at a perilous 32 for five.

The 37-year-old Connor, Man of the Match, finished with four for 13. Hampshire's own lack of top-class batting, though — their captain Robin Smith missed the game with a broken finger — was then exposed as they struggled themselves.

The all-rounder Chris Tolley recorded a competition-best 77 to inspire Nottinghamshire to a one-wicket win with three balls to spare in a tense finish against Somerset at Trent Bridge.

Tolley, Man of the Match after recording figures of one for 26 in his 12 overs, saw his side to within two runs of the third round before falling to a catch at cover by Richard Harden off Andrew Caddick.

"The England paceman then made nerves jangle by yorking Chris Read with his next ball before the tail-

The cricketers' noughts that can be turned into a big plus



Frank Keating

ANGUS FRASER's staunch nought not out in his short, sweet and stirring last-wicket partnership with Robert Croft at Manchester on Monday was roundly acclaimed but it was not remotely as valuable financially as his first-ball duck had been in England's first innings the morning before.

Fraser's ignominious Sabbath duck could be worth £20,000 to the Primary Club, cricket's long-standing charity for the blind, whose 10,000 members happily agreed this spring to pay £2 every time an England player in a Test suffered a "primary", or "golden" duck.

Old Trafford was a good match for students of ducks. Not that Graham Thorpe should fret about his "pair" (two innings, two ducks). Possibly England's finest series of the century, v Australia in 1981, began with cringing "pairs" in the opening two Tests for Bob Woolmer and Ian Botham.

The "pair" is an extended embarrassment; the "primary" first-baller by definition is operationally terminal, a one-off single gunshot execution. Not only Auntie Vi on the holiday beach but almost every all-time great qualifies to wear the Primary Club necktie. Sunil Gavaskar, probably history's most luminous opener, was thrice out in the first ball of a Test match. W G Grace (18w J.C. Shaw, South v North, The Oval, July 1871) and Brian Lara (10w Mike Smith, Warwickshire v Gloucestershire, Bristol, June 1988) suffered other notable golden ducks.

Any day now, in this English summer, will be posted a century of first-class batsmen's first-ball ducks. By July 1 the total was 85, most of them seasoned associate members. Gloucestershire, championship challengers, lead the 1998 "golden ball" league with nine first-batters so far. Their captain Mark Alleyne logs three. Next come

Yorkshire with eight, with Warwickshire, Northamptonshire and Durham on seven.

Gilt-edged golden-ducker of the summer so far is Durham's Mel Betts, who has been fired out by a single shot four times. There is no firm evidence that the golden duck is contagious, although Betts began his run of first-batters in the match after Durham had played Cambridge at Penner's. He was in close proximity to the University's J P Lowe, who was primarily pinged out two days running (April 18, 19w Brown; April 19, 1w Brown).

The late broadcaster Brian Johnston was long-time champion of the Primary Club (run by a husband-and-wife team from PO Box 12121, London NW1 9WS), which last year distributed £70,000 to sport for the blind, and this year sponsors the Knock-out Cup for the Blind at Lord's as well as funding two England players to the World Cup for the Blind.

The new club patron is Derek Underwood. He is worthy of the office, for in his second season with Kent, against South Africa at Canterbury in 1965, Derek globed the golden closer twice in a day; stumps spreadeagled first ball by Peter Pollock in the first innings and, Kent following on, c Van der Merwe b Macaulay, first ball in the second.

NEXT month we celebrate the 50th jubilee of an historic duck, Don Bradman b Holmes at The Oval. But that was a second-baller. Sixty Augusts ago another famous gunshot execution (by Somerset's Bill Andrews at Taunton) had the bowler later entitling his memoirs *The Hand That Bowled Bradman*, although on that day the Don had given away his wicket, having scored 202. By then, anyway, Bradman had been six years a Primary Club member. On December 30, 1932, the first Test delivery he faced on the Bodyline tour, Bradman was bowled by Yorkshire's Bill Bowes at Melbourne, first ball. The pin drop silence was "a theatrical producer's triumph," noted Bowes later, and the batsman at the other end, Jack Fingleton, wrote of "an unbelievable hush of calamity, for men refused to believe what their eyes had seen, as Bradman left the wicket and figure". It remains probably the most primary coloured Primary of them all.

Scotland v Derbyshire

Dean quashes Scots' uprising

David Hopps at The Grange

FETTES COLLEGE, alma mater of Tony Blair, might glimmer grey on the skyline above Grange CC, like the castle in the Wizard of Oz, but even New Labour's entire coterie of power brokers, lobbyists and spin doctors could not have made out much of a case for Scottish cricket yesterday.

Just as we had begun to think that Scotland had become versed in the art of winning friends and influencing people, along came the sort of lamentable performance designed to have doors slammed in their faces. Past, want to have a word with Scotland? After the manner of this seven-wicket defeat against Derbyshire, not likely.

Qualification for next summer's World Cup, a first-round NatWest victory against Worcestershire on this same ground a fortnight ago and three narrow group defeats in the Benson and Hedges Cup these have all been unmistakable signs of improvement.

But Scotland's collapse to 118 all out, from the mayhem of 19 for six, was a story of injudicious shots and misjudged runs on a pitch of reasonable pace and reliability. Derbyshire were most inconvenienced by sporadic drizzle as they made the runs in 32.2 overs.

Kevin Dean, a sturdy left-arm seamer, caused immediate disruption, dismissing three Scotland batsmen for ducks in his first two overs. Bruce Patterson, experienced and in form, drove to mid-off

in a manner that belied both assertions. Routine edges accounted for Douglas Lockhart and Mike Smith, and when Steve Crawley made a hash of a pull at Dominic Cork and was smartly held by the diving Michael Slater, Scotland were three for four and interest strayed to how the A team were faring against Bangladesh at Broughty Ferry.

Derbyshire's resources were stretched beyond their new-ball attack. That allowed Ian Stanger and Peter Steinfeld to formulate some kind of recovery, although two foolish run-outs and the stumping of Greg Williamson off a wide, fiddled down the legside by Kim Barnett, squandered wickets to the end.

Derbyshire's reply spluttered forward when the Australian Slater was bowled for nought shouldering arms at Asim Butt. Scotland's adopted Pakistani, whose official age, approaching his mid-twenties, resembled Scotland's score, being considerably lower than might have been forecast.

It was left to the old fox, Barnett and debutant Robin Weston, seeking to rebound released by Durham, to ensure that the rest would be largely straightforward.

● The Worcestershire batsman Graeme Hick has signed a contract extension which will keep him at New Road for three more seasons.

The new deal, which includes a benefit season next year, will run until the end of the 2001 campaign. By then the England batsman will have been with the club for 17 years.

Scoreboard

NatWest Trophy

Second round

Derbyshire v Scotland

Derbyshire won by seven wickets.

SCOTLAND

1st Innings: 19 for 6 (19.0 overs).
2nd Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).

Derbyshire

1st Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).
2nd Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).

Warwickshire v Kent

Second round

Warwickshire

Warwickshire won by 167 runs.

Kent

1st Innings: 136 for 10 (42.1 overs).
2nd Innings: 136 for 10 (42.1 overs).

Nottinghamshire v Somerset

Second round

Nottinghamshire

Nottinghamshire won by one wicket.

Somerset

1st Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).
2nd Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).

Gloucestershire v Lancashire

Second round

Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire won by five wickets.

Lancashire

1st Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).
2nd Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).

Southampton v Hampshire

Second round

Southampton

Southampton won by three wickets.

Hampshire

1st Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).
2nd Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).

Derbyshire v Warwickshire

Second round

Derbyshire

Derbyshire won by seven wickets.

Warwickshire

1st Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).
2nd Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).

Derbyshire v Warwickshire

Second round

Derbyshire

Derbyshire won by seven wickets.

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Second round

Derbyshire

Derbyshire won by seven wickets.

Warwickshire

1st Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).
2nd Innings: 118 for 10 (32.2 overs).

Victory for House of Lancaster.

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France 98

Taffarel blessed as hands of God

Alex Bellos in Rio finds Brazilian fans' anxiety transformed into a final formality

Saint Taffarel who is in goal like a guardian angel, saves like honey, defending our goal, our hope, our happiness, this urge to sing and dance, that comes from you that comes from your blessed hands.

BRAZIL canonised the much-maligned goalkeeper Claudio Taffarel yesterday after his two penalty saves earned him his sixth World Cup final. Taffarel was on the cover of all the newspapers and Rio's highbrow *Jornal do Brasil* even published a prayer by a leading writer in his honour.

Taffarel's status was confirmed by no less an authority than President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who declared him a national hero, and a baby born in Belo Horizonte, as his mother watched the match, was instantly given the player's name.

From spontaneous all-night street parties to the blanket coverage on television and in the newspapers, one would have thought Brazil had already won the World Cup. The feeling that the semi-final was really the final had been articulated most strongly by Pele, so the prevailing attitude about Sunday's climax now is that it will be a formality. For the first time since the tournament began there is a real belief that Brazil will be *Penta*, or five-times champions.

Beforehand pundits were sceptical that the team would get in time, now they believe the front line of Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Denilson is playing attacking "football-art" of the highest quality and can demolish any opposition.

Eclipsing the cheers for the outfield players, the 33-year-old Taffarel has gone through something of a divine resurrection. The wealth of praise and support is a remarkable volte-face since he was initially and universally panned as the team's weakest link.

"I have long been a member of the Baptist Church of Brazil," he said yesterday. "They have had 10 or 11 meet-

ings for me since the start of the World Cup praying for God's help, and tonight we got it. Cesar Sampaio is a member of the same religion and he scored three goals in this tournament."

Taffarel's form at Atletico Mineiro, an undistinguished Brazilian club, had been poor and he was only first choice because of Zagallos' insistence that he rises to the occasion. The reassessment of Taffarel mirrors that of Zagallos, formerly the second most unpopular man in the squad, who is now lauded for his stubbornness in keeping faith with his goalkeeper, although Taffarel's sanctification confirms the short memories of Brazilian fans.

Despite being part of the World Cup-winning team in 1994, he was declared a pariah the following year when Brazil lost on penalties to Uruguay in the Copa America final. The criticism hurt him, he said, and he said he would never play for the national team again.

It is a reminder of how goalkeepers, perhaps quicker than any other player, can turn from hero into villain. The most famous example is Barbosa, who picked the ball from the net after Uruguay scored to win in the 1950 World Cup. Barbosa, now 76, is still regarded as a national disgrace and lives in poverty near the port of Santos where he cannot even afford a telephone.

The burden of public expectation also affected Roberto Gomes Pedrosa, who kept goal for one losing game in the 1950 World Cup, and Castilho from 1964. Both men committed suicide for reasons that were never fully explained, leading some to conclude that the job is cursed.

Taffarel should revel in the adulation while it lasts.

Saint Taffarel, saint and hero, to be a goalkeeper is to be born a little and to die a little, but to be your devotee is to be reborn in the festival that comes from you.



Model fan... Ronaldinha is all for her fiance Ronaldo

Ticket allocation plays into clutches of touts

Mark Tallentire mingles outside grounds and notes lessons for the next World Cup

OUTSIDE Parc des Princes for the Argentina v Jamaica game a thirty-something woman with a toddler in arms was adamant that she would take no less than £100 for her £25 ticket, and she must have got it as around 4,000 were locked out after kick-off and it was no place to let a child walk home alone.

It is hoped that the organisers of the 2002 World Cup in Japan and South Korea will take on board some of the lessons to be learned from France 98 where, although stadiums have been practically full, far too many tickets have been allowed to fall into the hands of people in France who did not necessarily want them but were nevertheless

happy to speculate and accumulate.

Allocations of 2,000-4,000 tickets per team did not appear to cover the needs of any country's support. As the demands of the French were well catered for, moreover, the allocation system played into the hands of the touts, mostly English, all of whom know a thing or two about scalping.

Their asking prices have typically started at around £200 (£2,000 for group games and anywhere between £300 and £500 for knock-out matches, although good reductions have been picked up by those prepared to wait. Carpet-bagging locals who have been sitting on a ticket or two since January have also gone on the prowl, chanc-

ing their arms around town at anywhere between £100 and £200, which was more than most touts would pay.

Outside the Argentina v Jamaica game several French couples had obviously decided to give up their afternoon's football, casting in their precious tickets for £200 a pair.

Another woman strolled around with a hand-written sign offering two tickets for last night's semi-final at St-Denis, at that time between countries unknown, for £1,000 the pair.

Before the Brazil v Denmark quarter-final in Nantes last Friday there were 10 English touts working the railway station forecourt and a square in the town's old quarter, all carrying hand-written signs saying "cherchez places" and "finale", most with a mobile phone in hand and some in cahoots with a local gaffer. By mid-afternoon the price was an immovable £250-£300.

One would-be football watcher, an American, spoke of getting into five early games for around cost price, his coup being a £25 ticket for £20 to see the Holland v Belgium game at St-Denis five minutes after kick-off.

Between afternoon trains business was slow and the touts were grumbling. But by 5pm, the last realistic time to pick up a ticket and make it to Le Beauvoire for the 9pm kick-off, the initial £200 asking price became £140 and then £110 for a £25 seat in Row F behind the goal.

Others arrived after the kick-off, having paid £50-£20, a victory for the common man.

One Yorkshire tout groaned that he had arrived with 40 tickets and was going to lose about £1,000. He said he was disappointed that France had not been knocked out so that local interest would drop off. "Yeah, greedy sods," replied another without a hint of irony.



Fans for the memory... Nick Faldo trudges off the practice ground yesterday, where fans have been set up to keep away the midges, before withdrawing from Loch Lomond with an elbow injury

PHOTOGRAPH: IAN STEWART

Loch mess as powerless Faldo faces Open elbow

Patrick Glenn at Loch Lomond

NICK FALDO, the three-times former Open winner, may miss this year's championship for the first time in 22 years because of a painful condition that has left his right arm in a plaster cast from wrist to elbow.

Faldo was forced to withdraw from the Loch Lomond tournament yesterday, less than an hour before his noon tee-off. Suffering from "golfer's elbow", he sounded pessimistic about making Birkdale next week. "I've lost the power in my arm and I can't get my backswing even to halfway."

Faldo first felt twinges a month ago and had been

using ice packs to reduce the inflammation. "On the practice range this morning something went 'boom', I felt this stabbing pain and knew I was in trouble."

He will undergo intense physiotherapy between now and next Thursday using the facilities at the European Tour's on-site 3M Physio unit. A member of the unit, Jonathan Shrewsbury said: "Nick has a soft cast on his arm, an arresting splint to immobilise his wrist and elbow. He will keep that on for two days. He is getting electro-therapy three or four times a day as well as ultrasound treatment and intensive physio. He still has eight days and that can make a big difference."

In effect Faldo probably has only five days. If he is unable to play a proper practice

round by Tuesday, it is unlikely he will be in condition to tee off on Thursday.

In Faldo's absence another British former US Masters champion Ian Woosnam produced an almost flawless 67 — four under par — to take the first-day lead at Loch Lomond. With five birdies and one bogey the Welshman established a one-stroke advantage over Scotland's Gary Orr, the Englishman David Howell and Italy's Costantino Rocca.

Curiously Woosnam ascribed his form on the greens to a one-eyed method of judging the line of his putts. "At the Irish Open last week I had a young local lad, Dermot Byrne, as a caddy and I couldn't believe the lines he was giving me. But I took his advice and the ball was going in. Today I tried to close one

eye to see if I could see the lines better. I closed my right, then my left to see if it appeared the same line. It certainly seemed to help."

In future, perhaps, he should take to the course with clubs, balls, gloves and eye patch.

Orr, born and raised in Helensburgh, seven miles from the course, confessed to feeling relaxed and happy to be spending the week with his mother Mary. "It's not often I get the chance these days," said Orr, who played in the same group as Woosnam.

Howell, the 23-year-old from Swindon, shared the lead until a bogey five at the 18th dropped him into joint second place. Rocca moved alongside the young British pair with a birdie at the last.

The tournament favourite Colin Montgomerie lacked inspiration in an unevenly opening 72 but Lee Westwood, second choice in the betting, had a solid, two-under 69. Tom Lehman, the defending champion, blew a start that yielded two birdies in the first four holes, carding 73.

With the wind gusting and the rain occasionally approaching Biblical proportions, the afternoon starters had the worst of the conditions. A similar weather forecast for today suggests that scoring records will be safe.

Era ends as Nicklaus misses first major since 1961

JACK NICKLAUS has pulled out of next week's Open at Royal Birkdale — the first major he has missed since the 1961 US PGA Championship. The Golden Bear, now 58, had played in 37 successive Opens since his debut at Troon in 1962.

His withdrawal was

prompted by a troublesome hip, allied to a groin strain sustained, ironically, while bear-hunting. The next longest active streak is his 146 consecutive majors in 1961.

Faldo's 44. Nicklaus, winner of a record 18 majors and player in 154, has also withdrawn from next month's US PGA in Seattle. "After 42

years my ability to compete at the highest level on a continuous basis is marginal at best," he said.

The Spaniard Miguel Angel Martin and American Michael Bradley have also scratched from Birkdale, the former because of a wrist injury, the latter for unspecified reasons.

Rugby League

Walker to quit after Sky deal

Andy Wilson

SIR RODNEY WALKER was yesterday persuaded by his fellow directors to stay on as chairman of the Rugby Football League until next Wednesday's Special General Meeting, at which the member clubs must decide whether to accept a revised five-year television contract from Sky.

However, Sir Rodney admitted that his recent appointment as chairman of the UK Sports Council will force him to step down shortly. He is also chairman of Leicester City plc and Brands Hatch,

and accepts that he is spreading himself too thinly.

Sir Rodney's departure will be a huge blow to the RFL, which is still waging an ongoing battle with Super League Europe. He has lent invaluable assistance to Neil Tunncliffe since the latter took over as chief executive after Sir Rodney had forced Maurice Lindsay to resign.

Most recently this assistance has come in the form of brokering a settlement between the Super League clubs, the lower division clubs and Sky for a new television deal. A number of lower division clubs rejected Sky's initial proposal of a new five-year

contract for Super League only, insisting that any new deal should also include guarantees that promotion and relegation will continue.

Now it is understood that Sir Rodney has come up with a solution which satisfies all parties, which would be a fitting way to end his years of service to the game.

"My objective is to have by Wednesday unanimous support for the offer," Sir Rodney said yesterday. "There will be a series of meetings between now and Tuesday, and I hope that by then we're in a position to make a positive decision on the offer."

Formerly the chairman at

Walesfield Trinity, he will perhaps best be remembered as the man who had the guts to stand up to Lindsay. And when he does go, his comments about his former chief executive promise to make lively listening.

As for a successor, no one springs to mind, which is further evidence of the damage his departure could do. Tunncliffe is likely to look outside the game's current power-brokers, and whoever does take over will be confronted with the continuing wrangling with Lindsay, now managing director of Super League Europe. It is not an edifying prospect.

Football

Boro chase United striker

Ian Ross

TEDDY Sheringham's brief and undistinguished Manchester United career may be about to end with a move to Middlesbrough.

United's manager Alex Ferguson has always publicly backed the £3.5 million striker but, if he could recoup around £2.8 million, he would probably sanction the sale.

Although the 33-year-old Sheringham arrived from Tottenham little more than a year ago as a replacement for Eric Cantona, he had a disappointing season and was dropped on several occasions.

Middlesbrough's manager Bryan Robson, who has just completed the £2.3 million signing of Gary Pallister from United, is keen to add guile and experience to his squad in a bid to avoid a repeat of the relegation suffered in May 1997 after only one season in the top flight.

Sheringham may welcome a change. If Ferguson's pursuit of Ariel Ortega proves successful he would probably be consigned to the reserves. United should learn this weekend whether their offer of around £2 million has been accepted by Valencia.

But Dwight Yorke, mooted as a partner for Andy Cole, has been offered a new five-year contract, thought to be worth £25,000 a week, at Aston Villa, where Julian Joachim has now signed a five-year deal.

The Cameron midfielder Marc-Vivian Foe, meanwhile, has been told to prove he has fully recovered from a broken fibula before United consider resurrecting a £4 million deal to sign him from Lens.

Blackburn, who earlier this week let Stuart Ripley go to Southampton for £1.5 million, are expected to seek the reserve striker Jason Beattie to Saints for £1 million.

Newcastle yesterday blamed agents for trying to drum up an interest in Barcelona's £4 million-rated Oscar Garcia, but the Spanish midfielder is claiming that he has talked over a move with Kenny Dalglish in La Manga.

Dalglish will be back behind his manager's desk next week and, although his club have confirmed an interest in Monaco's £2 million-rated John Collins, they deny an interest in Garcia. But the 25-year-old told the Spanish press: "Newcastle's interest is very flattering. My thought is to stay with Barcelona but the decision may not depend on me."

Sevin Kegan is hoping to sign the former England winger John Salako. The 29-year-old free agent was released by Coventry last season and had talks with the Fulham manager yesterday.

Kendall link with job for United States

THE former Everton manager Howard Kendall could be invited to become the new coach to the United States of America, national side, writes Ian Ross.

Kendall left the Merseyside club by mutual consent a fortnight ago but is anxious to make a swift return to management.

Steve Sampson stepped down as the US coach 10 days ago following his country's elimination from the World Cup Finals after three defeats in the first round of the tournament.

Terry Venables has appointed Terry Fenwick and Ted Buxton to his coaching staff at Crystal Palace. Fenwick, the former England international, becomes first-team coach after leaving Portsmouth with Venables last season.

Buxton becomes personal assistant to the new manager, who has also appointed Dave Butler as physiotherapist.

Meanwhile at Portsmouth, also in the First Division, the manager Alan Ball, in his second spell there, has completed the signing of the Greek international striker Nikos Kyziridis in a £100,000 move from Paniliakos.

The Featherby

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Hand Hammered Gutta

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Modern Ball

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STANDARD LIFE

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Hitman takes control, page 16
Silverstone at 50, page 18

Lara turns the corner, page 17
Faldo may miss the Open, page 19

SportsGuardian

France 98

Second semi-final: France 2 Croatia 1

France claim their place in the sun

David Lacey in St-Denis sees hosts make a date with Brazil

TWO goals from Lilian Thuram last night took France to their first World Cup final and an encounter with Brazil, the holders, on Sunday, even though Laurent Blanc's sending off raised late French fears and Croatian hopes.

A tedious first half was instantly brought to life in the second when Davor Suker put Croatia ahead. But seconds later Thuram brought the scores level with his first international goal, after exchanging passes with Youri Djorkaeff, and in the 69th minute he drove a powerful shot into the far corner of the net, this time following a one-two with the substitute Thierry Henry.

Blanc's dismissal in the 75th minute by the Spanish referee Jose Garcia Aranda stopped the French celebrations in their tracks. The sweeper tangled with Slaven Bilic, pulling his shirt and catching him in the face with hand-off. The red card looked harsh but was at least consistent with some of the tournament's other dismissals.

The semi-final between

Brazil and Holland in Marseille had offered so much but fell short of expectations. Less was expected of last night's game in terms of spectacle, but with France on the threshold of a World Cup final for the fourth time, and willed on by a home crowd, the evening was heavy with nervous tension.

For the French, after three disappointments at this stage in previous tournaments, a day of glory lay tantalisingly within reach. Obviously Croatia, not so much a new nation as an old one reborn, had less to lose.

The match was always likely to be a dour battle of defensive wills rather than a stylish contest of attacking wits. Yet each side possessed an individual capable of turning the match. Never was there a better opportunity for Zinedine Zidane or Zvonimir Boban to respond to his cue. In fact Boban reacted almost immediately with a late tackle on Elixente Lizazu, the defender responsible for curbing the thrusts of Igor Stanic on the right which had so worried Germany.



Brought to heel... Croatia's captain Zvonimir Boban at full stretch at the Stade de France in last night's semi-final

PHOTOGRAPH: RICARDO MAZALAN

Zidane is a player of variable moods but last night he looked brisk and alert and by the fourth minute had tested Drzen Ladic with a low drive. Stéphane Guivarch, having laid the ball back.

Given Zidane's gift for finding unexpected angles with passes or runs Croatia's policy

of allowing France midfield space looked dangerous. Yet France's attack took a little time to begin shooting from a range of less than 25 yards and those shots they did attempt tended to be off target.

Boban, meanwhile, had lobbed Suker through the France defence with disarming

ease. An unproductive corner followed but the moment still reminded St-Denis of the latent threat in Croatia's attack.

France, however, were building the better momentum and gradually finding their way through the outer layers of Croatia's defence. Djorkaeff and Guivarch were fractionally short of finishing off

thoughtful movements, then Didier Deschamps ran on to a tapped free-kick for a shot that Ladic only held at the second attempt.

After half an hour, in a move that seemed premeditated, Aimé Jacquet replaced Christian Karembeu with Thierry Henry to give France more speed and aggression on the right as well.

At this stage Croatia were rarely within scoring range, but 10 minutes before half-time Dario Simic gave Aljosa Asanovic the chance to take on Laurent Blanc, which he did with a clever change of feet. Blanc, however, blocked off the better angle and Asanovic shot wide.

Towards the end of the first

half, almost inevitably, a match dominated by defenders began to congeal for lack of fresh attacking ideas. In the 41st minute Guivarch headed a centre from Blanc back for Zidane to draw a diving save from Ladic which would have been more impressive had the ball not already been swinging

wide. By half-time the earlier passions had died to sporadic surges of optimism accompanied by stifled yawns, even the Mexican were had lost its attraction. But the second half changed all that. Within 20 seconds Croatia were ahead and within 90 France were level.

First Asanovic found the perfect weight and angle of pass to beat France's offside trap, which was undone in any case by Thuram's slowness in moving up. Suker, needing no second bidding, controlled the ball with a deft touch before driving it past Fabien Barthez.

Croatia rejoiced but forgot how vulnerable teams can be when they have just scored. Sure enough, Thuram, now up in attack, dispossessed a dallying Boban before exchanging passes with Djorkaeff and beating Ladic.

Now everything was more positive. The French were keen to increase the tempo and while their opponents were at times still passively inclined, they were sprinting into attacking spaces with more purpose.

SUBSTITUTIONS France: Henry for Karembeu, 51 min; Trabucchi for Guivarch, 55; Lescud for Djorkaeff, 75. Croatia: Maric for Boban, 65; Prosnicek for Stanic, 65.

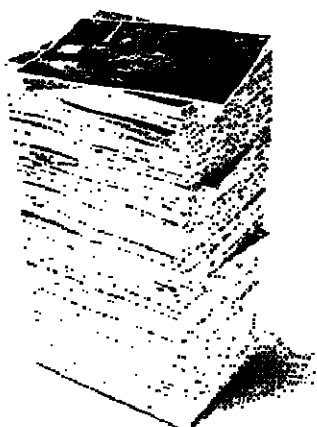
SENT OFF: Blanc, 75; Asanovic, 80; Stanic, 85.

REPORTER: J M Garcia Aranda (Spain).



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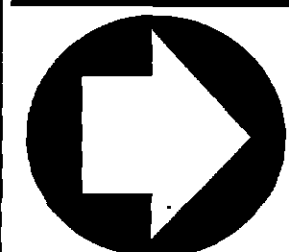
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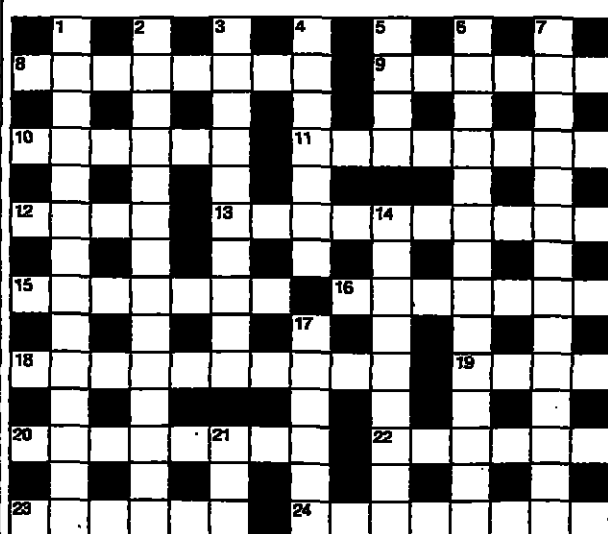


Meet Shatap
- he is 10
years old.
His bones
are grossly
deformed by
fluoride in
drinking
water
pumped
from a
borehole at
the bottom
of the lane.
Online

G2 p12

Guardian Crossword No 21,322

Set by Araucaria



Across

- 8 Rustic in salt water gets figurative punishment (5,3)
- 9 Left inside with a soft coat - a little snow? (8)
- 10 More vigorous, d'you 'ear? Cool! (6)
- 11 Decent helping sees Paul left out (8)
- 12 A foot either way (4)
- 13 Twist with cries of pain by the sick under the light (10)
- 15 Loveless doomsday achieve celebrity (7)
- 16 Take up the cause of telepathy at 'ome (7)
- 18 Died having learned to read and write? Blot out (10)
- 19 A madman either way (4)
- 20 Place of growth and prosperity, abandoned now to mob - and rats? (8)

- 22 Young people's leaders in spa go sideways, singularly (6)
- 23 Room in Rome for verse (6)
- 24 Blow from the beam by unhesitating snake? (4,4)

Down

- 1 Russian sweet (Bretton version) for first of three sisters (3,6)
- 2 The Old Bill? (Bill to force Mum to embrace Gallagher?) (3,2,10)
- 3 Unaffected by love of the war, moved to a lousy place (5-5)
- 4 Gas for glass (7)
- 5 King of the Football Association (4)
- 6 Female cats take bird with eggs, from a2 or h7 onwards (5,1,4,1,4)
- 7 Putting things right by carrying round money for house (15)

- 14 Where the dumb sleep in Beale's story? (8-4)
- 17 Don't be seen wearing the king's coat (7)
- 21 Address to friend is precious (4)

Solution tomorrow

25 Stuck? Then call our solutions line on 0800 333 228. Calls cost 50p per minute at all times. Service supplied by AT5

